

# IS JESUS GOD?

## THE PHILOSOPHICAL AND HISTORICAL PROBLEMS WITH UNITARIANISM AND ARIANISM

by Eric V. Snow

Is Jesus God? Is Jesus the Eternal? If so, how are He and the Father still one God? Was Herbert W. Armstrong right when he wrote this?: "Christ and the Father are one God, not two Gods--one Elohim"? (his emphasis, "Is Jesus God?," reprint article, 1955, p. 2). Recently, our traditional teaching has been questioned by a former UCG pastor in Australia, Orest Solyma, and by recent letters to The Journal by Anthony Buzzard and Duane Giles. Furthermore, in The Journal, several other writers have denied Herbert Armstrong's teaching of the divinity of Christ, and have written long articles defending Unitarianism and/or Arianism, such as Sir Anthony Buzzard, Charles Hunting, Wade Cox, and Gary Fakhoury. Using a number of seemingly strong arguments, the last has argued in a three-part series in The Journal that Jesus is not God. However, once it is realized that Fakhoury's superstructure of arguments rests on questionable premises, it all comes tumbling down. The four basic premises are: (1) The Old Testament evidence almost uniformly reveals God to be one Person. (2) The Jews correctly interpreted the Old Testament as for God's nature, but not Jesus' statements concerning His Deity in the New Testament. (3) It's implicitly assumed that God's revelation of His nature in the Bible is fully developed and fundamentally uniform from Genesis to Revelation. Hence, any New Testament evidence that points to Jesus being God or for multiplicity in the Godhead is dismissed by using unusual translations or interpretations of the Greek, taking alternative readings of the textual evidence, or said to be an allegory since it supposedly contradicts the Old Testament. (4) When a text that calls Jesus "God" can't be evaded by any other means, then it's said the word "God" doesn't mean "God" (i.e., the Supreme Being who is omniscient, omnipotent, the author of creation, and all-loving), but has some lesser meaning such as "divine hero" or "an angel." Doctrine ends up dictating to grammar, instead of grammar dictating doctrine. Although some arguments by Buzzard, Hunting, and Cox are dealt with in passing, here below mainly Fakhoury's articles denying the Deity of Christ are examined by further developing each one of these points, which shows that the New Testament when taken straight reveals Jesus to be God. Let's first survey more generally the Scriptural evidence for the Deity of Christ and His eternal co-existence with the Father before analyzing the specific counter-arguments of Arian or Unitarian writers.

### DOES IT MATTER WHETHER JESUS WAS GOD?

But before turning to the evidence favoring Jesus being God, let's examine why

this issue even matters. Especially in the UCG, many seem to believe the nature of God question is irrelevant to practical, everyday Christian living, unlike (say) the Sabbath, Holy Days, tithing, and other matters the Worldwide Church of God changed its doctrines on in late 1994. Here, I suspect, the predominantly Anglo-Saxon cultural heritage of most church members comes home to roost, especially among us pragmatic Americans: We are especially apt to dismiss philosophy and high theology as having no practical effect on our lives. But having a mistaken and/or vague notion of the God we serve inevitably affects our spiritual lives. In reply to the Samaritan woman, Jesus remarked, "You worship that which you do not know; we worship that which we know, for salvation is from the Jews" (John 4:22, NASB throughout, unless otherwise stated). If we have mistaken ideas of who and what God is, it inevitably causes us to worship Him equally incorrectly. Jesus noted that "those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (v. 24).

## PROBLEMS WITH THE UNITARIAN THEORY OF REDEMPTION

For example, consider the fundamental problem with Unitarian (Socinian) theology for the theory of redemption. Suppose Jesus was not the Creator of humanity or the world, and had no preexistence. How can the death of a mere man, a man who (despite being virgin born and sinless) was no greater than (say) the prophets Isaiah or Jeremiah, save us from our sins? Herbert Armstrong's theory of the atonement (Mystery of the Ages, pp. 210-11) maintains that since Jesus was God and the actual Creator of all humans, His life was worth far more than all human lives combined. God, being a consistent enforcer of His law, had condemned all humans to death for their sins, and couldn't arbitrarily cancel them without putting His sense of justice in question.

Consequently, to rescue mankind from its sins, only the life of Someone worth more than all our lives put together could pay the penalty of our sins while keeping His law intact. But that price couldn't be paid, unless the Creator in all respects became also like the part of the Creation to be redeemed. Jesus had to die, because only human death could pay the penalties for human sin. Yet, He also had to be the Creator of humanity, since only then would His life would be worth more than all the other human beings who had ever lived. Importantly, Jesus' sinlessness is a necessary but not sufficient condition for saving humanity, for that isn't enough by itself to do the job. Ultimately, Unitarian theology undermines our appreciation for what Jesus did because the level of sacrifice He engaged in is almost infinitely lessened (cf. Rom. 5:7): No longer does the Almighty Jehovah who lived from all eternity and created the universe die for us, but rather just (perhaps) a virgin-born, sinless man who is just like ourselves otherwise.

## THE GOSPEL OF JOHN PROVES JESUS IS GOD

The Gospel of John poses more problems for Unitarian theology than any other book of the Bible. Indeed, its theme can be summarized as describing Jesus Christ, the

One who was fully God and fully man, and His teachings for those already converted. In order to refute Gnostic teachings that denied Jesus came in the flesh, but just appeared to have a body of flesh and blood (II John 7; I John 4:2-3), John also emphasized Jesus' humanity. Its opening verse affirms the Deity of Christ: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Since in verse 14 "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us," the Word undeniably was Jesus. To evade this verse, Unitarians have argued that the "Word" merely was a thought in the Father's mind, since verses 2-3 refer to the "Word" impersonally. (For verse 2, the NASB literal marginal rendering is "This one.") This argument is simply unpersuasive, since this "thought" is called "God," and because this "thought" was the Creator "itself" in verse 2: "All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being." Could a mere "thought" alone in the Father's mind create the universe by itself?

## JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES ON JOHN 1:1

Jehovah's Witnesses tackle John 1:1 differently. Importantly, they are Arians who deny Jesus was God but who (unlike Unitarians) do affirm His preexistence before the Holy Spirit impregnated the Virgin Mary. They assert the last clause should be translated "and the Word was a god" (New World Translation). To really prove this translation's dishonesty by examining the Greek grammar would consume much more space than is available here. Such complicated issues like Colwell's rule appear, which states a "definite predicate nominative" never acquires an article ("the" or "a") when preceding the verb. Interested readers should turn to John M. Bowman's Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989) for a thorough refutation. But consider this intuitive point: Since John mentions the "Word" was in the beginning in the first clause before referring to the Father ("God") in the second, this by itself strongly implies His eternal preexistence. Furthermore, John deliberately wrote a seemingly self-contradictory, equivocal, paradoxical statement, since the "Word" was with "God," yet the "Word" also was "God." To say the Word was merely "a god," robs this poetic verse of its power. Using a small "g," this translation makes a distinction possible only in few languages besides English. (Ironically, many of the earliest Greek manuscripts are in all capitals!) Furthermore, this mistranslation leads to polytheism, since Jesus is a "little god," the Father is a "big God," making  $1 + 1 = 2$ ! Tersely yet poetically, John uses the word "God" in two different ways, first to refer to the Father, second to the Godhead or Divine Family generally, which includes Jesus as well as the Father.

## JESUS' UNIQUELY CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FATHER

Another key verse showing Jesus is God is John 5:18: "For this cause therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill [Jesus], because He not only was breaking the Sabbath [as they defined it], but also was calling God His own Father, making

Himself equal with God." Jesus referred to the Father in such a familiar way (v. 17), unlike other Jews, they thought He was committing blasphemy. Similarly, Jesus stated in John 10:30, "I and the Father are one." For this remark, the Jews immediately (v. 31) picked "up stones again to stone Him." Why? "'For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God" (v. 33). At this point, if Jesus wasn't God, immediately He could have clarified His identity by issuing a simply plain denial right then. Instead, side-stepping the accusation by quoting Psalms 82:6, He affirms He is the Son of God (v. 34).

As the Jews understood Jesus when He used this title, "the Son of God" implied divinity and not just Messiahship. (Theoretically, one could claim to be the Messiah yet deny being God). Taking on this title cost Jesus His life. His crucifixion followed the supposed blasphemy of saying He was the Son of God (John 19:7; Luke 22:67-71; Matt. 26:63-66; Mark 14:61-64). After all, in John 10:30-34 and elsewhere, He got into trouble for calling God His Father, and for saying He had a special, close relationship with Him that all other humans didn't have, i.e., He was a special son of God, the "only begotten" (John 3:16; cf. His avoidance of "our Father" in John 20:17).

## JESUS IDENTIFIES HIMSELF AS YAHWEH

Then consider John 8:58: "Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.'" Implying He was Jehovah, Jesus alluded to the burning bush incident, in which God stated "I am who I am" (Ex. 3:14). To evade this verse's implications, Unitarians and Arians attempt to retranslate one or more words in it. One option is to turn "was born" (NASB, lit. margin, "came into being") into a reference to the resurrection ("came to be") of Abraham. Another claims "I am" should be translated "I was" or "I have been," in order to say Jesus merely asserted He lived before Abraham did. Again, the technicalisms of Greek grammar can't be pursued here, but the reader is referred to Bowman's work mentioned above. But both of these alternate strategies totally fail before the implications of verse 59: "Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him." Why did they want to stone Him? For blasphemy! If Jesus merely was announcing He lived or would be resurrected before Abraham did or would be, unbelieving Jews might have marked Him down as eccentric (re: verse 56). But certainly this was no offense worthy of death.

The context of John 8:58-59 concerns issues about Jesus' identity (see verses 12, 19, 24, 25, 28, 53). The chapter ends by Jesus asserting that He is the Eternal, the uncreated Creator, by contrasting Abraham's coming into being with His eternal existence (cf. Ps. 90:2). Later, during His arrest (John 18:5-8), Jesus' saying "I am" (the "He," is italicized, showing the translators added it) caused the crowd to draw back and fall to the ground. Their response strongly implies Jesus was making a divine claim, not merely stating when He lived compared to Abraham. By these statements, Jesus was likely also alluding to where the Eternal says "I am (He)" in Isaiah 41:4; 43:10, 46:4; 52:6.

## THE APOSTLE THOMAS' AFFIRMATION OF JESUS' DEITY

After His resurrection, Jesus confronted doubting Thomas, who replied in total astonishment, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). Again, if Jesus wasn't God, this exclamation presented Him with the golden opportunity to correct Thomas' would-be misimpression. But, of course, He did no such thing. Thomas wasn't using a irreverent euphemism, something which may be common today but was virtually unknown in his culture. Instead, remembering that Thomas' earlier devotion and service to Jesus shows he wouldn't casually throw around God's name in vain, in context his previous unbelief was overwhelmed, dazzled, and rebuked by the personal proof of Jesus' Deity by His resurrection from the dead.

The Gospel of John is full of statements by Jesus which no Old Testament prophet would dare make about himself, but which came naturally to Him. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me" (John 14:6). "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies" (John 11:25). "I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12). "I said therefore to you, that you shall die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you shall die in your sins" (John 8:24). "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:54). "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned" (John 15:5-6). "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). "All may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him" (John 8:23). Would have Daniel or Ezekiel even dream of uttering such thoughts in reference to themselves?

## JESUS COULD FORGIVE SINS BY HIS OWN AUTHORITY

Turning to further proofs of Jesus' Deity found in the other Gospels, consider Jesus' ability to forgive sins by His own authority. While healing the paralytic, Jesus told him "your sins are forgiven" (Mark 2:5; cf. Luke 5:19). Immediately, some of the scribes hearing Him questioned His apparent presumption: "Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mark 2:7). Despite knowing their thinking, Jesus proceeded to assert His authority to forgive sins (v. 10), without doing anything to correct their interpretation of His statement. Remember, He wasn't forgiving sins committed against Himself, i.e., as an individual who had been wronged or offended, but was forgiving sins generically.

## JESUS WAS WORSHIPED

Since only God is worthy of worship (Matt. 4:10), if Jesus was worshiped by anyone without Him rebuking him (cf. Rev. 22:8-9; Acts 10:25-26; 14:12-15), that would prove His Deity. The Magi from the east "came into the house and saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell down and worshiped Him" (Matt. 2:11). Now, the standard Unitarian/Arian reply states that the Greek word translated "worshiped" here is ambiguous. It can refer to people paying their respects to a king or high authority figure by bowing down to them. Hence, Jehovah's Witnesses, in their New World Translation, have "falling down, they did obeisance to it." But is this alternative translation always persuasive, given the context of the situation in which Jesus was "worshiped"? Consider when Jesus miraculously walked on water and controlled the weather by making the wind stop the moment He and Peter (who ran out on the water towards Him, only to sink) got back into their boat (Matt. 14:33): "And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, 'You are certainly God's Son!'" Having just so overawed them by demonstrating His powers over nature, as God has, was this mere "obeisance"? That hardly seems likely. Similarly, when the disciples first met Jesus after His resurrection (Matt. 28:9; cf. v. 17): "They came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him." Considering Thomas' exclamation when he first met the risen Christ, is it plausible to think after Jesus' stunning victory of life over death that the disciples merely bowed down to Him as if he were a human king, as if He were Henry VIII?

Hebrews 1:6 states the angels worshiped Christ: "And when He again brings the first-born into the world, He says: 'And let all the angels of God worship Him.'" Since Jesus in the immediate context is being deliberately contrasted with the angels (v. 4-5, 7), is this mere "obeisance" to a Being that Jehovah's Witnesses identify also as Michael the Archangel? Is Jesus then just a superior, but fellow, angel? Notice then Heb. 1:8: "But of the son He says, 'Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever'" Jehovah's Witnesses attempt to elude this verse by this alternative translation: "God is your throne forever and ever" (NWT). Although grammatically possible, is this sensible? How does God Himself become a "throne"? If this (somehow) means Jesus derives His authority from God, then He is no different from the angels that this verse is supposed to be contrasting Him with. Verse 10 cites from Ps. 102:25: "And, 'Thou, Lord, in the beginning didst lay the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of thy hands.'" Identifying Jesus as the Creator, the author of Hebrews plainly applies to Jesus the Psalmist's words about Yahweh (notice Ps. 102:18, 20, 22). Since Jesus is Yahweh, He is surely worthy of the angels' worship!

One interesting reference about Jesus receiving worship as God obliquely occurs in Revelation 7:10-11, 17: "And they cry out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.' And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God. . . . for the Lamb in the center of the throne shall be their shepherd." Notice how God sits on the throne in v. 10, and receives worship, but v. 17 affirms Jesus sits on that throne Himself! The worship that these great spirit beings gave to God on His throne can't possibly be downgraded to the kind of respect humans show when bowing to a king. Although it's affirmed indirectly, these

verses still remain strong evidence for Jesus receiving worship.

## JESUS WAS THE CREATOR

Further evidence that Jesus is God comes from statements stating He was the Creator, a major defining attribute of God. If Jesus was the Creator, it also proves His preexistence, which refutes Unitarianism if not Arianism. "From the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ" (Eph. 3:9, NKJV). "Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him" (I Cor. 8:6). "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" (John 1:3, NKJV). "For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things have been created by Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together" (Col. 1:16-17). Logically, if Jesus made "ALL things," then He Himself couldn't be one of the "things" made!

## THE ALPHA AND THE OMEGA

At the beginning of Revelation appears a most intriguing text for the Deity of Christ. "'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,' says the Lord, 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty'" (Rev. 1:8, NKJV). "Alpha" is the first letter of the Greek alphabet, while "omega" is the last. In red letter Bibles, these words will properly appear in red, since Rev. 22:12-13 shows Jesus spoke them: "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." (See also Rev. 1:17-18; 2:8 for further evidence). Could someone else besides Jehovah be "the first and the last"? Note Isa. 44:6: "Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: 'I am the first and I am the last, and there is no God besides Me.'" (See also Isa. 41:4). If the Eternal is the only God, could anyone besides Him be "the first and the last"? The following text plainly identifies "God" and "the Alpha and the Omega" as one and the same (Rev. 21:6-7): "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. . . . He who overcomes shall inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son."

## PAUL AFFIRMS JESUS IS GOD

Paul affirmed the Deity of Christ in Col. 2:9: "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form." Trying to dodge this verse, Jehovah's Witnesses mistranslate it as "all the fullness of the divine quality dwells bodily" (NWT). But the word translated "Deity" here is "theotetos," not "theiot." Despite Thayer was a Unitarian himself, his Greek-English Lexicon (p. 288) denied this interpretation of "theot" (his emphasis):

"deity i.e. the state of being God, Godhead . . . theot [in Greek letters]. deity differs from theiot [in Greek letters]. divinity, as essence differs from quality or attribute." Since the verse mentions Christ as possessing "all the fullness of Deity," its immediate context completely destroys any attempt to translate this word as weakly affirming Jesus's divinity anyway.

Expectantly awaiting Christ's return, Paul wrote (Titus 2:13): "Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus."

A similar expression appears in II Peter 1:1: "by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ." These translations are disputed--Jehovah's Witnesses are not alone with such renderings as "the great God and of [the] Savior of us, Christ Jesus" (NWT) and "of our God and [the] Savior Jesus Christ" (NWT). The latter translations assert "God" and the "Savior" separately refer to the Father and Son, instead of combining the two expressions together to refer to the Son alone. Does ambiguity reign? In fact, a major problem arises against the New World Translation's rendering. In the Greek, this grammatical construction connects the two nouns with the word "and" (kai) in between, while placing a definite article "the" before the first noun but not the second. Bowman maintains that every time this construction appears when using singular nouns and common ones denoting persons (brother, Savior, Lord, Son, Father, etc.), both nouns refer to just one person. Josh McDowell and Bart Larson (Jesus: A Biblical Defense of His Deity (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1983), p. 26) call this a "Granville Sharpe construction" because one article refers to both nouns inseparably. Furthermore, at least for Titus 2:13, note that the context points to Christ's second coming--Paul can't be referring to the Father's appearance!

While describing God's dealings with Israel, Paul identifies Jesus as Jehovah in I Cor. 10:4, 9 (NKJV): "For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. . . . nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents." Jehovah's Witnesses attempt to evade the first text by translating the word for "was" as "meant" (NWT). But the straightforward normal meaning of the Greek is "was," not "meant." Only while laboring under the theological view that Jesus couldn't possibly be Yahweh could someone insist on translating/interpreting the Greek so unconventionally. Similarly, Paul in Rom. 14:9-12 (NKJV) calls Christ "Lord of both the dead and the living," states, "We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ," applies an Old Testament text about "the Lord" (the Eternal) to Him, and finishes, "So then each of us shall give account of himself to God."

While discussing humans giving an account of themselves to God as their judge, Paul plainly equates Jesus, God, and Yahweh as one and the same!

## MESSIANIC TEXTS AND JESUS' DEITY

Does Matthew 1:23 show Jesus is God? "'Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bear a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,' which translated means, 'God with us.'" The name Jesus received strongly implies His Deity, because God and the Jewish culture in Scripture often name people for what they are. Hence, Moses was



drawn out of the water as a baby, Abraham became the father of many nations, Jacob did supplant his brother for the birthright, Esau was hairy, Israel did strive with both God and men, Eve was the mother of all living, and Adam was the (first) man. Although today in our culture parents rarely name their children to describe who and/or what their offspring are, the Bible reveals God and patriarchal culture operated differently. Since Jesus was the God-Man who lived among humanity as a man while being God as well, "Immanuel" as a name fits perfectly.

Since the Old Testament portrays the Messiah as being God, this means Jesus must be God (Isa. 9:6-7): "For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father [or "Father of Eternity"], Prince of Peace." If the Unitarian replies the title "Mighty God" shouldn't be taken literally, then neither can the other three titles, which is unacceptable. Does Jesus being "Mighty God" make Him into an inferior semi-divine being compared to the "Almighty God" who is the Father? Isaiah's next chapter (verses 21-22) refutes this claim, for Yahweh is called "the mighty God." The Old Testament also describes the Messiah as preexisting before the Virgin Mary became pregnant, even as eternally existing by one meaning of "olam" ("forever") (Micah 5:2; cf. Heb. 7:3): "From you [Bethlehem] One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity." Furthermore, "They will look on Me [Yahweh] whom they have pierced" (Zech. 12:10).

## OTHER TEXTS THAT POTENTIALLY AFFIRM JESUS' DEITY

Although perhaps more disputable, other texts given a standard translation or interpretation say Jesus is God. For example, I John 5:20 reads: "And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding, in order that we might know Him who is true, and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life." The most natural reference for "This is the true God" is "His Son Jesus Christ." Remember that John began his letter referring to Jesus as someone who could be touched "and the life was manifested, and we have seen and bear witness and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us" (I John 1:2). If Jesus was "the eternal life" at the beginning of John's letter, presumably He still is the "eternal life" at its end!

Consider now Romans 9:5 (NKJV): "of whom are the fathers and from who, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen." Of course, this verse can easily be translated to avoid the reference to Jesus being God. But the mere fact that's a perfectly possible meaning indicates how Paul, at least here, didn't strive to avoid grammatical constructions that could point to multiplicity within the Godhead--a thought once unthinkable to any true Jew. Acts 20:28 presents another example: "The Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." True, "Son" in brackets can be inserted to complete the thought after the word "blood." But again, since the first translation is the simplest, it indicates Paul (who was speaking here) didn't strive to avoid language at

all costs that potentially referred to Jesus as God, as possibly compromising monotheism (belief in one God).

One controversial text is I Timothy 3:16 (NKJV): "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: 'God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory.'" The alternative reading places "He who" for "God." The dispute here concerns not translation as such, but the long-running debate between the Received/Byzantine text that underlies the KJV and NKJV, and the Critical/Alexandrine text that underlies most modern Bible translations. "Theos," "God" appears in the Received text, while "os," "(He) who," surfaces in the Critical text (i.e., Westcott-Hort, Nestle-Aland). Excepting for the spurious Trinitarian interpolation inserted into I John 5:7-8, the WCG traditionally maintained the Received text was normally the better of the two. The space isn't available to explain the reasons why it's better to follow the vast majority (but later) manuscripts representing the Received text instead of the older (but many fewer) manuscripts upholding the Critical. Skeptics questioning the reading of "God" for I Timothy 3:16 would find it worthwhile tracking down the English textual critic John Burgon's 76-page defense of it in The Revision Revised. (A good general defense of the Received text can be found in David Otis Fuller, ed., Which Bible? (Grand Rapids, MI: Grand Rapids International Publications, 1975)).

## DOES THE ONENESS OF GOD RULE OUT JESUS BEING GOD?

Having presented above briefly the positive case for Jesus' Deity, it's necessary now to examine some of the objections raised against it. The leading objection goes like this: Since Scripture repeatedly says God is one or that only one God exists (Deut. 6:4; Gal. 3:20; James 2:19; I Cor. 8:4; Rom. 3:30; Isa. 44:6,8; Jude 25; II Sam. 7:22, I Kings 8:60; Deut. 4:35, 39; Mark 12:32), calling both Jesus and the Father "God" contradicts the rest of the Bible. If Jesus is one God, and the Father another, that makes for two Gods--which is absurd, and a total denial of traditional Jewish monotheism. In reply, it's necessary to recall Gary Fakhoury's brilliant insight that we should define the word "one" as the Bible does, not as our a priori (before experience) human reasoning and speculations indicate (cf. "The Nature of God: A Biblical Review," pp. 10-17). As Herbert Armstrong always stated, let the Bible interpret itself.

Now the word translated "one" in the Shema of Deut. 6:4 is "echod." This word can mean composite unity, not an indivisible, solitary unity. Genesis 2:24 uses the word "echod" thus: "For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh." Here two separate individuals become "one." Similarly, the giant cluster of grapes carried on a branch between two of the spies scouting out the Holy Land for Israel was "echod" (Num. 13:23). Despite apparently having hundreds of grapes, the cluster still was called "one" or "single." The Greek word for one, "heis," merely repeats the same story, since it can refer to composite unity as well. For example, the analogy between the human body and the church makes "one" out of many (I Cor. 12:12): "For even as the body is one and yet

has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ." Similarly, many can be "one" in Phil. 2:2 (NKJV): "fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind." The non-spurious part of I John 5:7 (ASV) makes three into one: "For there are three who bear witness, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and the three agree in one." In light of this Scriptural evidence, it's wrong to insist the texts that affirm God's oneness must mean God is one single Person (center of consciousness).

## GENESIS 1:26 AND THE PLURAL OF MAJESTY

Does the Old Testament ever attribute to God a plurality of Persons? Although Hebrew term for God, "elohim," is in the plural, it almost always takes singular verbs or pronouns. But a few exceptions do arise (Isa. 6:8; Gen. 11:7), most notoriously Gen. 1:26: "Then God said, 'Let US make man in OUR image, according to OUR likeness.'" Those asserting monotheism requires God to be a single Person commonly employ two interpretive strategies to evade this text's implications. One asserts that God spoke to the angels here. But since Scripture never says the angels are creators, even assistant creators, this claim is totally unpersuasive. Another approach maintains God here used the "plural of majesty," as Queen Victoria did in this statement attributed to her, "We are not amused." Of course, the question then becomes why God almost never uses the plural of majesty, even when in Isaiah He is affirming His greatness compared to His creation and mankind, except in a very few, isolated cases. (A serious scholarly investigation should be launched to see how and whether Israelite and other kings of a Semitic culture commonly used the plural of majesty, or whether it appeared in myths about false gods of the ancient Middle East). But must ambiguity reign? Notice Gen. 3:22: "Then the Lord God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil.'" This construction can't be explained as a "plural of majesty" because "one" is set against "Us." Despite being not the most straightforward interpretation, the claim God used the "plural of majesty" in Gen. 1:26 may not be able to be decisively refuted at the present state of knowledge. But in light of Gen. 3:22, the view "Elohim" can't refer to a plurality of Persons in the Godhead wears exceedingly thin.

## HOW THE WORD "GOD" HAS MORE THAN ONE MEANING

Arians and Unitarians like to trot out texts such as I Cor. 8:6 to prove Jesus is Lord but not God: "Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him." So if there's only "one God, the Father," does this exclude Jesus? But inverting this question is easy: If Jesus is the only "Lord," does that mean the Father is never the "Lord"? Yet Jesus Himself calls the Father "Lord" in Matt. 11:25: "I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and Earth." Similarly, Jesus' citation of Ps. 110:1 plainly applies the name "Yahweh" to the Father, although He used the standard Jewish terminology of "the Lord" for the Tetragrammaton (YHWH): "For David himself

says in the book of Psalms, 'The Lord said to my Lord . . . David therefore calls Him 'Lord,' and how is He his son?' (Luke 20:42, 44). Plainly, as Vance Stinson observes in the CGI booklet Who, What Is God?, pp. 36-37, the word "God" has more than one meaning. Often the word "God" refers to the Father in particular, as distinct from Jesus. But other times, "God" refers to the divine Family or Godhead, to all Persons who are of the same eternal substance and essence, so it includes Jesus and the Father together. In this light, the use of both meanings of "God" in the one verse of John 1:1 is especially noteworthy, since the Word (Jesus) was with God and the Word was God.

## DOES REVELATION 3:14 PROVE JESUS WAS CREATED?

Another verse Arians seize upon to "prove" Christ was created appears in one of the letters to the churches, where Jesus is speaking (Rev. 3:14): "And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God." On its face, this verse is unclear: Was Jesus "the Beginning of the creation of God," i.e., the first being made by the Father, or was Jesus "the Beginning of the creation of God" by starting the making of the universe? The word translated "Beginning," arche, has more than one meaning. First of all, it can mean "ruler." The NIV translates the key part of this verse as "the ruler of God's creation." Second, arche can simply mean "origin," which merely confirms again Jesus as the Creator, as Moffatt brings out: "the origin of God's creation." The TEV (GNB) has "the faithful and true witness, who is the origin of all that God has created." Third, it's true--this verse can mean Jesus was created first. But this verse's very ambiguity leads us to state a basic principle of interpreting Scripture: It's illegitimate to take one or a few verses to contradict the great weight of evidence going in the opposite direction. It's much easier to take the relatively few verses that purportedly deny Jesus' Deity, and reconcile them with the many that affirm it directly or indirectly, clearly or somewhat arguably, than to exalt the few verses that supposedly deny it, then engage in all the great sweat and effort of constantly having to explain this, that, and more away. Fundamentally, Jehovah's Witnesses and all Unitarians opted for the latter choice, which simply becomes unpersuasive since they're inevitably, almost constantly, on the defensive when facing knowledgeable opposition. Their defenses take on the feel of scientists propping up an old paradigm under attack by constantly devising ad hoc "explanations" for numerous anomalous facts that contradict it.

## HOW WAS THE FATHER GREATER THAN JESUS?

In order to deny Jesus is God, Arians and Unitarians commonly turn to John 14:28 as proof: "Because I go to the Father; for the Father is greater than I." But since Jesus was in the flesh when saying this, it's fundamentally unconvincing. So long as Jesus was a human, He voluntarily limited His Divine prerogatives. In a text that proves Jesus' preexistence, He asked the Father to restore "the glory which I had with Thee before the world was" (John 17:5). Notice He had it "with" the Father--this can't be a

reference to Jesus' existence being a mere thought in the Father's mind that He willed to do. If the Unitarian interpretation was correct, that unactualized thought would have to have the same glory Jesus possessed when really existing--which is absurd. Instead, He is asking to have back what He used to have, when He had in unlimited measure all the attributes of the Almighty Yahweh. The pouring or emptying out (kenosis) of Jesus meant He choose to limit His divine prerogatives (Phil. 2:6-8). For example, Jesus was not omniscient while He walked the earth, since He didn't know the day of His return (Matt. 24:36). (Although here we (and HWA in the past) run into the theoretical theological problem of asserting Jesus was God when He lacked some of the defining attributes of God such as omnipotence while in the flesh, we should still call Jesus "God" then as well as "man" because Scripture does). As for John 14:28 itself, consider what your reaction would be to someone you know telling you, "Well, God is greater than me." You'd consider him or her unbearably pompous for stating the stunningly obvious. Such a statement by Jesus implies the highness of His earlier claims about His relationship with the Father.

Other texts about Jesus' relationship with the Father plainly show He was subordinate to Him: "But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ" (I Cor. 11:3). "And when all things are subject to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, that God may be all in all" (I Cor. 15:28). In light of the other texts affirming Jesus' Deity, these Scriptures merely show Jesus had less authority than the Father--that the Father was Jesus' "boss." But just as men and women are both intrinsically equal in their ultimate spiritual destinies, despite within marriage husbands have authority over their wives (I Cor. 11:3), these texts don't prove Jesus' essence or substance differed from the Father's.

## JESUS WAS "THE FIRST-BORN OF ALL CREATION"

Another text Arians and Unitarians appeal to is Col. 1:15, which calls Jesus "the first-born of all creation." Does this mean Jesus was the first being created? First, it's important to examine this term in its Old Testament, Jewish cultural context, not in light of our modern presuppositions. Receiving a double portion as an inheritance, the firstborn son of a Jewish family was considered preeminent over his siblings (cf. Reuben in Gen. 49:3). He, not his younger brothers, became the head of the family after his father's death. Hence, the term "firstborn" took on a connotation of authority and position of favor. Job uses it metaphorically to refer to death (Job 18:13), and Isaiah to the poorest of the poor (Isa. 14:30). Although Manasseh was the firstborn of Joseph's sons (Gen. 48:14-20), Ephraim gained the greater blessing from God through Jacob, so he is referred as the firstborn in Jer. 31:9: "For I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is My first-born." Similarly, God calls the nation of Israel His "firstborn" (Ex. 4:22). Furthermore, there's the possibility for an alternative translation for the Greek word translated "first-born," "prototokos," can mean "original bringer forth," according to the Roman Catholic scholar Erasmus (1466?-1536), although admittedly neither

Thayer's nor Baur-Arndt-Gingrich confirms this meaning.

Second, we in the Church of God should remember that Jesus was the first to be "born again" by eventually becoming a spirit being after His resurrection (I Cor. 15:44-45). Jesus was the "first-born from the dead" which gave Him "first place in everything" (Col. 1:18). But we Christians at the resurrection are to be "born again" just as He was (Rom. 8:29): "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren." Although Jesus became the Son of God once the Virgin Mary became pregnant (not before, nor from all eternity--Heb. 1:5), He "was declared the Son of God with power by ['as a result of,' NASB margin] the resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4). John 3:6, 8 should be given a plain interpretation, not a metaphorical one: "That which is born of the flesh IS flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit IS spirit. . . . The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so IS everyone who is born of the Spirit." As the GCG minister Dave Pack has so ably shown in his book "Except There Come a Falling Away", Herbert W. Armstrong's teaching on the subject of being begotten by the Spirit at baptism, but born again at the resurrection, is fundamentally sound. HWA's insights on this matter show Arians and Unitarians are grasping at straws when using this text to prove Jesus was a created being.

ON THIS SUBJECT, THE COUNCIL OF NICEA WAS RIGHT!

Much more Scriptural evidence in favor of Jesus being Jehovah, the Almighty God, could be presented. Although a number of the texts discussed above can be evaded to one degree to another, and alternatively retranslated, reinterpreted, and/or dismissed as textual errors, still so often the main weight of the semi-ambiguous texts point to the Deity of Christ, over and above the clear ones. The great insight of Herbert W. Armstrong on the nature of God was to deny the Trinity while still affirming the Deity of Christ and plurality in the Godhead, since most non-Trinitarians reject the latter teachings as well. Although the Trinitarians are wrong overall, their affirmation that Jesus is God is thoroughly correct. Given the two basic choices the Council of Nicea faced in 325 A.D., the bishops who voted for Athanasius and against Arius were right. (The original Nicene declaration merely asserted they believed "in the Holy Spirit," saying nothing about its nature. Arguably, so far as it goes, HWA could have affirmed it!) For this article, I lifted arguments in favor of the Divinity of Christ from such deeply flawed works as Walter Martin and Norman Klann's Jehovah of the Watchtower, Robert M. Bowman Jr.'s Why You Should Believe in the Trinity: An Answer to Jehovah's Witnesses, and Josh McDowell and Don Stewart's Handbook of Today's Religions: Understanding the Cults. Although full of doctrinal error, these books by defenders of traditional Christian doctrines are undeniably right on this one doctrine. It seems 80% or more of the emotional energy of Trinitarians is eaten up defending Jesus is God--denials that the Holy Spirit is a Person and/or God simply arouse their visceral reactions far less. Despite Herbert W. Armstrong went against so much traditional

Protestant and Catholic theology, in this regard he sided with them, for good reason. We should avoid the knee-jerk reaction that "because they teach it, it must be wrong," but instead concern ourselves with what the Bible teaches. Ultimately, it's much more persuasive to fit the Bible's jigsaw pieces together to declare "Jesus is God," rather than to twist and pound them into place to proclaim "Jesus isn't God."

## DOES THE OLD TESTAMENT UNIFORMLY REVEAL GOD TO BE ONE PERSON?

Above, the basic case favoring the Deity of Christ was made. Now let's turn to the arguments of those associated with the Church of God who uphold Unitarianism or Arianism. A fundamental problem the Church of God faces today comes from those who think at some level the Jewish interpretation of the Old Testament (or the Sacred Calendar) is usually correct. Hence, some believe the Jewish interpretation of the Old Testament concerning when Pentecost (Sivan 6) and Passover (Nisan 15) occur is right, even though convincing evidence from the Scriptures shows otherwise. Similarly, Fakhoury (as well as Buzzard and Hunting in their article in The Journal) operate from the premise that the uniform Jewish teaching that God is one Person is correct, even when the Old Testament by itself contains evidence that contradicts it. By merely citing a large number of texts that say "God is one," Buzzard and Hunting seem to think that the emotional impact from raw repetition (which uses an assumed definition of "one" as a monolithic singularity) is nearly enough to carry the argument by itself. As for Fakhoury, he makes a false "trilemma" when writing, "Either Jesus was not eternal God made flesh, or the Hebrews did not believe there is only one God being, or their writings are not, in fact, entirely sound guides for faith and doctrine." A fourth option is ignored, namely that the Jews have misinterpreted their own Scriptures, especially because they rejected Jesus as the Messiah and the New Testament as the further revelation of God. Making an analogy to the Sabbath as a doctrine, Fakhoury argues that the traditional Jewish view of God being one couldn't possibly have been changed without controversy in the New Testament. But as such texts as John 20:28 and Matt. 28:9 demonstrate, following His miraculous resurrection from the dead, which had confirmed acts and statements He had made during His ministry implying or affirming His Deity, Jesus' disciples almost instantaneously acceptance of His Deity vaporized their old views that God was one Person. The further clear revelation of God instantly trumped traditional Jewish interpretation of Old Testament Scripture, thus permanently removing all controversy from the primitive, first-century church. Fakhoury also contends that the Old Testament "prophets do declaim on the nature of God and are consistent (and insistent) that there is only one God person/being." Here he merely accepts the Jewish interpretation of the OT. As argued in my previous essay, the definition of "one" the Bible has may not be what we humans think it should be based on our human reasoning. In reality, since the New Testament helps us interpret the Old Testament, and vice versa, we should be wary of following in the footsteps of centuries-old Jewish tradition. This tradition has been influenced by paganism (as Philo and the name of the

month "Tammuz" show) and has not had the Holy Spirit to guide its development for, by now, almost two millennia. Let's consider some of the evidence that shows that the Old Testament adumbrates faintly what the New Testament clearly reveals: God is one, but more than one Person is God.

Consider the brilliant insight of evangelical scholar Robert Morey, who applies deductive instead of inductive reasoning to the understanding of Scripture.<sup>1</sup> A priori (before experience), suppose a Unitarian or Arian inspired the writing of the Bible. How would that differ from what a Binitarian (who believes two Beings make up the one God) author would have had placed in the Bible? After opening the Bible and examining its text (i.e., the evidence), whose presuppositions/hypotheses are confirmed? For example, would a strict Unitarian allow the word "elohim," a noun which is translated some 400 times as "gods," to be the main word for "God" in the Hebrew Scriptures?<sup>2</sup> "Elohim," which George Wigram's Englishman's Hebrew and Chaldee Concordance of the Old Testament (p. 79) lists as a masculine plural, appears well over 2000 times as the word for "God." The second most common word for God in the Old Testament is "adonai," "the Lord." The Jews usually read this word aloud in their synagogues in place of "Yahweh" when the Tetragrammaton (YHWH) appears in the Old Testament. "Adonai," which appears over 400 times in the Hebrew text, is a plural according to Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon (p. 10). When the two most common words for God in the Old Testament are actually plural nouns, does the Old Testament evidence favor the Arians and Unitarians' case as much as they think? By these nouns, probably nearly every page of the Old Testament (besides Esther) bears implicit witness to the multiplicity of the Godhead.

## PLURAL VERBS AND PARTICIPLES THAT REFER TO GOD

Further evidence that God implicitly revealed Himself to be more than one Person comes from the cases where plural verbs or participles refer to God. For example, the verb "caused to wander" in Gen. 20:13, which modifies the word "God," is in a plural form in the Hebrew. In Gen. 35:7, which says "God revealed Himself to him [Jacob]," the word "revealed" is in a plural form. The adjective for "Holy" in Josh. 24:19 is in a plural form, so it could be translated "God, the Holy Ones." In Psalms 58:11,

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Morey, The Trinity: Evidence and Issues (Grand Rapids, MI: World Publishing, Inc.), pp. 7-8, 87. Admittedly, Morey's book promotes false teachings such as the Trinity, the personality of the Holy Spirit, and presuppositionalism in apologetics (i.e., God is assumed to exist, not proven to exist). Nevertheless, its powerful arguments for the Deity of Christ and the multiplicity of the Godhead are freely drawn upon in this essay.

<sup>2</sup>Although Fakhoury properly notes "elohim" is used of singular entities, such as Moses, Dagon, and the Golden Calf, this argument ignores that this word's part of speech is a plural noun. Citing a few scattered references in which "elohim" refers to singular entities in order to deny its basic plural meaning is selective proof-texting as well.



David used the plural form of "judges" in reference to God. A crude literal translation into English would be "God who judge on earth." In Job 35:10, the word "Maker" is actually a plural participle in the Hebrew (i.e., "Makers") according to the vowel points. Notice Psalms 149:2: "Let Israel be glad in his Maker." The word "Maker" is in the plural in the Hebrew, which also happens in Isa. 54:5. The word "Creator" in Eccl. 12:1 is actually a masculine plural participle, "Creators," in the Hebrew. Hence, Fakhoury was incorrect to say that "verb tenses where elohim is used for the God of Israel are always in the first person singular, never the first person plural." Rabbi Tzvi Nassi, a lecturer in Hebrew at Oxford University, even says that the "passages are numerous" which lack "grammatical agreement between the subject and predicate."<sup>3</sup>

Clearly, the Old Testament refers to God as both the "Creator" and "Creators," as the "Maker" and "Makers." A Unitarian could accuse a Binitarian of "a mathematical impossibility," of believing the one God is made up of two Persons, yet the Hebrew agrees with the latter's viewpoint by implicitly portraying God as "one," but that "one" is defined in a way that allows for a multiplicity of Beings (re: Gen. 3:22, "like ONE of US.") Because a whole major doctrine might not be fully revealed in one place in Scripture since its bits and pieces may be scattered about within it, Binitarian teaching isn't self-contradictory. The Unitarian view has the burden of explaining away the many pieces that don't fit it, while the Binitarian view embraces the evidence that portrays God as one as well as the evidence favoring more than one Person being God. Hence, contrary to what Fakhoury maintains, the Binitarians aren't "making the exception the rule" or engaging in selective proof-texting, but they are formulating a doctrine that explains ALL of the evidence, anomalous facts to Unitarianism included, not just a good part of it.

## GENESIS 1:26 REMAINS AN OBSTACLE TO UNITARIANISM

Consider the cases where God uses plural pronouns when speaking, starting with the classic text on the subject: "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness'" (Gen. 1:26). Belying the claim that this is a supposed "plural of majesty," the Jews anciently had trouble explaining this text. In the Midrash Rabbah on Genesis, one rabbi made the following comments on it:

Rabbi Samuel bar Naham in the name of Rabbi Jonathan said, that at the time when Moses wrote the Torah, writing a portion of it daily, when he came to this verse which says, 'And Elohim said, let us make man in our image after our likeness.' Moses said, Master of the Universe, why do you give herewith an excuse to the sectarians [i.e., Christians], God answered Moses, You write and whoever wants to err let him err."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Tzvi Nassi, The Great Mystery (Jerusalem: Yanetz, 1970), p. 6, as cited in Morey, The Trinity, pp. 94-95.

<sup>4</sup>as quoted in M.G. Einspruch, A Way in the Wilderness (Baltimore: The

Obviously, if this text and those like it could be explained away as the plural of majesty, the rabbi(s) who wrote this passage could have easily disposed of this text's potential problems, since they certainly knew how Hebrew worked.

## THE PLURAL OF MAJESTY IS A HOAX!

According to Morey, during the intense nineteenth-century debates between Unitarians and Trinitarians, the plural of majesty was revealed to be a hoax popularized by the famous Jewish scholar Gesenius. Using the plural of majesty to explain this and other passages away commits the fundamental mistake of reading a modern monarchical convention back into Scriptures originally written millennia ago when this form of speech was unknown. As Nassi notes, the plural of majesty was "a thing unknown to Moses and the prophets. Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, David, and all the other kings throughout . . . (the Law, the Prophets, and the Hagiographa) speak in the singular, and not as modern kings in the plural. They do not say we, but I, command; as in Gen. xli. 41; Dan. iii 29; Ezra i. 2, etc." Compounding their error, the Unitarians attempt to explain even the plural word "elohim" away as a form of the plural of majesty, forgetting that the use of the royal "we" is limited to direct discourse and commands, not narratives or descriptions.<sup>5</sup> Given this kind of evidence, citing the authority of Gesenius or Bullinger is simply not persuasive as any kind of real proof that the Hebrew really does use the plural of majesty. The Unitarians and Arians should completely abandon this argument if they can't cite ancient Semitic literature in which kings used the plural of majesty.<sup>6</sup>

Consider the three other cases where the God of Israel used plural pronouns:

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Lewis and Harriet Lederer Foundation), p. 95.

<sup>5</sup>Nassi, The Great Mystery, p. 6, as cited in Morey, The Trinity, p. 96.

<sup>6</sup>It has been said that the plural of majesty isn't a hoax because in the Quran (Koran) Allah extensively uses "We," not "I." However, there still is a gap of over 2000 years between the time of Moses and the time of Muhammad, so something more ancient, and thus concurrent with the writing of the Hebrew Scriptures, is necessary to make this point stick. Admittedly, as John Wheeler has observed in a letter written to me dated December 24, 1998, the use of the plural noun with a singular verb used in agreement appears elsewhere in the OT, such as Wisdom in some Proverbs, the Behemoth in Job, and "your teachers" in Isa. 30:20. However, this still doesn't refute Morey's point about the plural of majesty (or, perhaps more precisely, the "royal we") being limited to direct discourse when spoken aloud. The question remains about why such terms are sometimes plural in form, and sometimes aren't, when power or might is implied may not be, strictly speaking, a "plural of majesty" because no monarch (including God) is speaking directly when they appear. Still, this issue remains, and constitutes one for further research: Did ancient Semitic monarchs or gods use the "royal we" in historical records or myths?

"Then I [Isaiah] heard the voice of the Lord [Adonai], saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for US?" (Isa. 6:8). "And the Lord [Yahweh] said, 'Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. . . . Come, let US go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech" (Gen. 11:6-7). "Then the Lord [Yahweh] God said, 'Behold, the man has become like ONE of US, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:22). To explain away such anomalous facts of Scripture, the Unitarian has to invent unconvincing ad hoc explanations, such as "the plural of majesty," "the angels were speaking or being spoken to," etc. By contrast, the Binitarian's teaching, which maintains that God is one but more than one being is God, effortlessly glides over such passages while still comfortably fitting the many more places where God uses singular pronouns.

## THE TWO BEINGS WHO ARE ONE YAHWEH

In the Old Testament, several texts appear which imply a duality in the Godhead because the mention of one Divine Person is juxtaposed with another's. First, note Genesis 19:24: "The Lord [Jehovah] rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone [sulfur] and fire from the Lord [Jehovah] out of heaven." Here "Jehovah" on earth does something on behalf of "Jehovah" in heaven! Concerning this text, the Protestant Reformer Martin Luther (1483-1546) wrote in his commentary on Genesis: "This mode of speaking greatly irks the Jews and they try in vain to explain it." This text can't be rationalized merely as using repetition for the sake of emphasis, because one Person who is Yahweh is contrasted with another who is also Yahweh since they are in different locations. As Morey remarks, "Just as the heavens cannot be interpreted as a repetition of the earth, neither can the first Yahweh be interpreted as a repetition of the second Yahweh." Furthermore, nowhere in the Pentateuch (which Moses wrote and/or edited) is a name repeated twice, once at the beginning and once at the end, as a literary device.<sup>7</sup> Although usually the one who became Christ was Yahweh as He spoke and acted in the Old Testament, both the Son and the Father can be called "Yahweh." In Ps. 110:1, "Yahweh" is applied to the Father. Since either member of the Godhead can be Yahweh, this disposes of Fakhoury's argument that "theological incoherence" results from saying Jesus is Yahweh. For example, Fakhoury argues that Simeon's addressing the Lord in heaven would be incorrect if "the God of Israel he was praying to was no longer in heaven but lying in his arms?" This kind of question assumes the Arianism that he is trying to prove, since it implicitly denies anyone else is God but one Person, and if Jesus was God and the only one who was God, then who was God in heaven when Jesus was down on earth? The Binitarian is easily rescued from this dilemma: The Father is Yahweh and God also, not just Christ, since the Godhead is dual, not singular.

## PSALMS 45:6-7 IMPLIES THE DUALITY OF THE GODHEAD

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<sup>7</sup>Martin Luther, Luther's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1958), p. 354; as cited in Morey, The Trinity, pp. 97.

Psalms 45:6-7 is another place which implies more than one being is God: "Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever [cf. Isa. 9:7]; A scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Thy kingdom. Thou has loved righteousness, and hated wickedness; Therefore God, Thy God, has anointed Thee with the oil of joy above Thy fellows." Although evidently starting with a purely human king, when the Psalmist reached this point, he spoke to God Himself, since the king was the Messiah in type. Only if the Psalmist believed the Messiah was both human and divine does this ultimately make any sense. The ancient Jews interpreted this chapter messianically, since at least one Targum paraphrased v. 3 as, "Thy beauty, O King Messiah, is greater than those of the children of men." The various purported alternative translations exist for Ps. 45:6 that attempt to escape the vocative "O God" simply aren't persuasive. (The vocative is a grammatical construction in which the person spoken to is named in a sentence addressed to him or her. For example, if a young girl calls out to her mother, "Mommy, come here!," she has used the vocative). After performing a highly technical grammatical and contextual analysis of this passage's Hebrew, Murray J. Harris concludes: "The traditional rendering, 'Your throne, O God, is for ever and ever,' is not simply readily defensible but remains the most satisfactory solution to the exegetical problems posed by this verse." The RSV's translation, "Your divine throne endures for ever and ever," can't be regarded as an equally likely translation, for the reason Harris notes: "If [Hebrew word for 'throne'] is in fact qualified by two different types of genitive (viz. a pronominal suffix kap denoting possession and an adjectival genitive, [elohim], meaning 'divine'), this is a construction that is probably unparalleled in the OT (see GKC [Gesenius' Hebrew-English Lexicon] [section]128d)."<sup>8</sup> Again, to interpret honestly the word of God, Christians should go with the main or standard meaning of the grammar and syntax except when that would plainly contradict other passage(s). Preconceived doctrines shouldn't dictate to grammar, but grammar should determine doctrines.

Since the writer of Hebrews plainly speaks of Jesus in v. 8, this verse's reference clear for any Christian. Consequently, the next verse's context ("Therefore God, Thy God, has anointed Thee") indicates that the Son has a "God" over Him, despite He Himself was called God in the preceding verse! Remember, "Messiah" means "the anointed one," so it's necessary that God the Father would anoint God the Son so He could be the Messiah. Since the Psalmist asserted that the Messiah would be God yet have a God over him, this makes New Testament passages like John 20:17 more understandable: "Jesus said to her [Mary Magdalene] . . . 'I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.'" This Old Testament prophecy shows that although God the Father is over God the Son in authority, still Jesus is God. Here again the Old Testament implies a plurality of Persons in the Godhead, since the God of v. 8 has a "God" over Him in v. 9.

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<sup>8</sup>Murray J. Harris, Jesus as God: The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992), pp. 202, 192.

## YAHWEH SENDS YAHWEH?

Another passage which implies the Godhead's plurality is Isa. 48:12-16: "Listen to Me, O Jacob, even Israel whom I called; I am He, I am the first, I am also the last. . . . And now the Lord God [Yahweh] has sent Me, and His Spirit." God is plainly the speaker in this section of Scripture, so the context indicates that God is the "Me" of v. 16. Yet, this "Me" is sent by Yahweh, i.e., the Father. (As noted above, the Father is clearly called "Yahweh" in Ps. 110:1). To evade this verse's implications, a Unitarian may unconvincingly assert that (suddenly!) Isaiah is speaking in verse 16. But there's little evidence that someone besides Jehovah is speaking, and nowhere else does Isaiah suddenly insert himself into some passage where God speaks and then exit.<sup>9</sup> Verse 17 shows that God is still speaking, "Thus says the Lord [Jehovah] . . ." Furthermore, neither the Septuagint (the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew and Aramaic Old Testament) nor the Targums (Aramaic paraphrases/translations of the OT made by the Jews) place a break in verse 16. Hence, only by holding a preconceived notion about God being a solitary Person could someone insist Isaiah spoke instead of God in v. 16.

## YAHWEH DELIVERS ISRAEL BY YAHWEH?

Another problematic Old Testament text for Unitarians and Arians is Hosea 1:7: "But I will have compassion on the house of Judah and deliver them by the Lord [Yahweh] their God, and will not deliver them by bow, sword, battle, horses, or horsemen." Here God is speaking ("I," as the preceding verses show), yet He suddenly seems to refer to Himself in the third Person, saying "Yahweh" will deliver them, as if "Yahweh" were not the one speaking. As Morey pungently explains, "If I as the first person promise to something for you as the second person through a third person, am I not implying that I am not the same as the third person? If grammar means anything, the answer is, 'Yes.'"<sup>10</sup> Although these four passages (Gen. 19:24; Ps. 45:6-7; Isa. 48:12-16; Hosea 1:7) don't directly assert the multiplicity of the Godhead as John 1:1 does, their indirect evidence for God being "elohim" and not just "el" requires of the Unitarians some fancy footwork to evade.

## THE SHEMA'S USE OF "ECHAD" SUPPORTS BINITARIANISM

The central Old Testament text thrust forth as proof that God is one Person is the Shema, which begins with Deut. 6:4. This passage, which every good Jew has

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<sup>9</sup>John Wheeler, a laymember of the Living Church of God, says the accents of verse 16 point to a break, although not a total divorcement, in the passage. After the phrase, "Come near to Me, listen to this," he believes it is the Messiah who is speaking since He is the subject of the immediately preceding verses. Personal communication, December 24, 1998.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 102.

memorized by heart in Hebrew, reads: "Hear, O Israel! The Lord [Jehovah] is our God, the Lord [Jehovah] is one." Of course, some dispute surrounds the exact translation into English, although the traditional Jewish interpretation agrees with the NASB translation cited above. One of the RSV's marginal translations is, "The Lord is our God, the Lord alone." (Since John Wheeler, a Living Church of God laymember who can read Hebrew, believes the accents point to the passage meaning, "the Eternal is one," this meaning is analyzed here). Drawing again upon Morey's insight about applying deductive reasoning to interpreting Scripture, let's examine the word translated "one" above. It happens to be that nine different Hebrew words are translated "one," but several of these are only applied to man or woman, so they can't plausibly refer to God. Of the words for "one" that can be applied to God, one of them, "yachid" (#3173) means absolute, indivisible unity, while the other candidate is "echad" (#259), which can mean a composite unity, of more than one entity put together and regarded as "one," although it more frequently refers to a singular unity as well. For example, a husband and wife became "echad" when joined together in sexual union (Gen. 2:24). So, a priori, if Moses applied "yachid" to God in Deut. 6:4, that would seriously damage the Binitarian position. But if "echad" describes God's unity, that would corroborate it, since it teaches that God is two Persons yet one God, i.e., a composite unity. Since "echad" is the word actually used to describe God's oneness in Deut. 6:4, this passage actually supports the Binitarian position better than the Unitarian position. For Unitarians to wield the Shema successfully against Binitarianism, "yachid" should appear here, not "echad."

## MOSES MAIMONIDES USES "YACHID" IN CREED

Further evidence that "echad" doesn't quite capture accurately the strict monotheism of Judaism comes from the word Moses Maimonides (1135-1204), the greatest medieval Jewish philosopher, chose when drawing up thirteen principles or articles of faith, which were still taught to Jews centuries later. For the second point, which proclaims God's oneness, he used not "echad," from the Shema, but "yachid"! Obviously, the word "echad" lacked the philosophical precision necessary to teach that God is one Person only. What the second point of Maimonides' creed underscores is the traditional Jewish conception of indivisible unity of God, which requires the word "yachid" for its exact expression: "I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, blessed be his name, is a Unity, and that there is no unity in any manner like unto his, and that he alone is our God, who was, is, and will be."<sup>11</sup> What was good enough for Moses wasn't good enough for a medieval Jewish philosopher nearly three millennia later! Far from inflicting a knockout blow against Binitarianism, the Shema's use of the word "echad" instead of "yachid" actually supports it better than Unitarianism!

## HOW GOD IS ONE YET IS MORE THAN ONE PERSON

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<sup>11</sup>as quoted by Rachmiel Frydland in Einspruch, ed., A Way in the Wilderness, p. 93; Morey, The Trinity, pp. 89-90.

In an argument that echoes one made almost a century ago by the founder of Jehovah's Witnesses, Charles Taze Russell, Fakhoury argues that the Binitarian conception of God is self-contradictory: "One plus 1 doesn't equal 1 any more than 1 plus 1 equals 1."<sup>12</sup> This problem's solution is really surprisingly simple: God is one, by the Bible's definition of "one," but this describes a composite unity, not a singular unity. Herbert Armstrong's explanation was that the Father and the Son were separate Persons/Beings (which a literal reading of the heavenly scenes in Revelation supports) while they still composed one Family. (True, Scripture never says, "God is a family." But since it describes the Godhead's members using the terms "Father" and "Son," and refers to Christians as "Sons of God," it's sensible to deduce from this evidence that God is a Family). When Jesus said, "My Father and I are one," He used the neuter, not masculine, word for "one." Had He used the masculine word, it would have implied the Father and Son were the same identical Person. But as shown by the reaction of those hearing Him proclaim His unity with the Father, the neuter implied that "I and the Father are one and the same entity by nature and essence." Similarly, a husband and wife are separate persons, yet they are one in sexual union. There's only one true church (i.e., a spiritual organization), but there are many members of it (I Cor. 12:20). We should define and use the word "one," as the Bible does, not as human, philosophical speculations say it should be used. As the growth of Islam may indicate, perhaps many humanly find a God who is one Person/one Being a simpler, "cleaner," easier concept to accept. But what is simple isn't necessarily what is true or Scriptural. The straightforward teaching of Scripture is that the Father and Son are one in essence, substance, and purpose, but are separate Persons, which John 10:30 in its context supports.

## THE OLD TESTAMENT'S THEOPHANIES VERSUS ARIANISM

Scripture affirms that nobody has ever seen God the Father (John 5:37): "You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form." Similarly, John 1:18 reads, "No man has seen God at any time." The context indicates both times that God the Father was meant, not "God" generally speaking. Fakhoury uses a creatively narrow definition of "seen" to avoid the consequences of John 1:18 for Arianism, but this falls before the greater detail of John 5:37. After all, John 1:18 speaks broadly, and says nothing about restricting its application to God's face or His glory. Why does this matter? Because the Old Testament repeatedly describes God appearing in a human form before men, mankind plainly saw God. And if the Father wasn't the One seen, then Jesus, God the Son, had to be the One seen. For example, Jacob wrestled with God, not just any average "angel" (which means "messenger" in both the Greek and Hebrew), as Gen. 32:24-30 and Hosea 12:4-6 show. Trying to explain this away by

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<sup>12</sup>For Russell's argument, see The At-one-ment between God and Man, Studies in the Scriptures, vol. 5 (East Rutherford, NJ: Dawn Bible Students Association, 1899 (original publication), pp. 54-55.

saying the word "God" doesn't mean "God" falls before the reality that "elohim" wasn't used in patriarchal times for the angels in the Bible. God appeared another time to Jacob as well: Gen. 35:1, 3, 7, 9, 13-13. A most remarkable theophany occurred when Abraham talked one-on-one to Yahweh in Gen. 18, as shown especially by verses 1, 22, 33. The elders of Israel saw God according to Ex. 24:9-11: "Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel; and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself. Yet He did not stretch out His hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel; and they beheld ['stared at'] God, and they ate and drank." Notice that Moses still did see God (Ex. 33:18-33; 34:5-8), for although "you cannot see My face" (God's full glory) He did promise, "you shall see My back." In Hebrew thinking, "face" was used as a synonym for "glory" because at that time the Jews believed the essential character of a person could be seen in his face (Prov. 7:13; 21:29; Eccl. 8:1). Furthermore, note that John 5:37 says God's voice has never been heard, yet obviously God's voice was heard in the Old Testament, such as when the Ten Commandments were proclaimed to Israel at Sinai (Deut. 5:4-5, 22-31; Ex. 20:1). Clearly, it couldn't have been the Father who spoke at Sinai.

#### WHEN THE MESSENGER OF JEHOVAH IS JEHOVAH!

Another set of theophanies arises as the "angel of the Lord" becomes "the Lord" Himself! It must be remembered that the words translated "angel" in both the Hebrew and Greek both really mean just "messenger." Therefore, they don't have to refer to a created spirit being (Heb. 1:7). Hagar spoke to the "angel" of Jehovah in Gen. 16:7-14, who she identifies as God Himself in v. 13. When Abraham nearly sacrificed his son Isaac (Gen. 22:9-14), the "Angel" implied He was Jehovah by saying in v. 12, "I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." So if Isaac had died, he would have been sacrificed to this "Angel." Nowhere does Scripture command sacrifices to be made to any (created) angel, so this Messenger had to be the Eternal Himself. During the burning bush incident in Ex. 3:1-15, the "Angel" (i.e., Messenger) of Jehovah in v. 2 becomes Jehovah Himself in v. 4. When Balaam insisted on going to see Balak to get dishonest gain and his donkey spoke miraculously, the passage interchangeably uses the terms "Messenger of Yahweh" and "Yahweh"! (See Num. 22:21-35). Fakhoury attempts to explain away the striking theophany in Judges 6:3-22 involving Samson's father Manoah and his wife by saying they only saw an angel whose acts they attributed to God as his authority. This interpretation dodges the text's intended meaning, because seeing a created "angel" would not be life-threatening, but seeing the Messenger of Yahweh who was Yahweh would be life-threatening. This interpretation reads additional thoughts into the text in order to make it compatible with Arianism, instead of taking it straightforwardly. Even more problematically for Unitarianism and Arianism, the mere fact that the Old Testament elides the "Messenger of Jehovah" into "Jehovah" implies by itself that more than one Being is called Jehovah! One (Jesus) is the messenger, or "spokesman," to humanity



for the other (the Father).

## DOES "GOD" MEAN "GOD"?

After arguing John 1 is an allegory, Fakhoury runs up against (evidently) the most insurmountable obstacle of all to a Unitarian or Arian--John 20:28: "Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and my God!'" Since this text cannot be dismissed as a textual error, as a mistranslation, as omitting the word "the" before the word "God," or as an allegory, when all else has failed, the last weapon in the Arian/Unitarian arsenal has to be unsheathed: "Jesus is clear in this Gospel that theos--god--can have a much broader meaning and application than only to refer to the one eternal God, which we normally mean when we use the word." That is, the word "God" doesn't mean "God." Of course, a similar argument is deployed against Ps. 45:6-7 and Isa. 9:6, by saying "elohim" and "el" had broader meanings than just Yahweh, the God of Israel.<sup>13</sup> Here the presuppositions of the interpreter become all-controlling: Is a preconceived definition of God being "One" (as in one Person) determining how the Hebrew and Greek should be translated or interpreted? Hence, the main or general meaning of the Biblical languages' grammar and syntax is overturned in the name of a doctrine developed from certain texts only. When the doctrine that God is only one Person encounters trouble with certain texts (i.e., potential falsification), the Unitarian/Arian replies that the word "God" suddenly loses its standard meaning in order to save his doctrine. As noted above, since Peter, Paul, Barnabas, and John's angel were so quick to correct those who misidentified them as gods or worthy of worship, how can we accept plausibly Fakhoury's explanation that Christ blithely accepted without rebuke Thomas' would-be blasphemy that He was his Lord and his God? In the context of Jesus' stunning victory of life over death, Thomas' testimony can't be credibly watered-down to some weaker definition of "God," especially when a weak idea of divinity was fundamentally alien to the Jewish monotheistic mind-set about the true God.

## FORCING THE NEW TESTAMENT TO FIT A PRECONCEIVED INTERPRETATION OF THE OLD

After unveiling this kind of argument, one has to ask, "What kind of Scriptural texts would be necessary to falsify Unitarianism in favor of another version of monotheism?" Such ad hoc, stop-gap "explanations" could be endlessly devised to neutralize any problematic texts confronting it. This word game only becomes plausible to its users and readers when assuming one belief above all: The Old Testament evidence overwhelmingly favors God being One Person. Therefore, the New Testament evidence that keeps seeming to say otherwise (John 1:1,14; 5:18; 8:58-59; 10:30-33; 20:28; Titus 2:13; Rom. 9:5; Heb. 1:3,6,8-9; I John 5:20; II Pet. 1:1; Rev. 1:8; I Cor. 10:4,9; Eph. 3:9; I Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16-17; Mark 2:7-10; Matt. 14:33; 28:9; I Tim.

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<sup>13</sup>As for Isa. 9:6 in particular, note that in the following chapter, Yahweh is the "mighty God" (Isa. 10:21), not some lesser god.

3:16; etc., etc., etc.) has to be constantly bent to fit a preconceived view of the Old Testament. (Of course, as explained above, the Old Testament evidence is hardly as one-sided as the Unitarians make out, but let's neglect that point for now). The Unitarian/Arian error resembles that of, but goes in the opposite of direction of, Brinsmead's Verdict articles against Sabbatarianism. Brinsmead basically argued that the Epistles interpret the Gospels' meaning, and the New Testament interprets the Old Testament, instead of having a mutually interactive process of each helping to explain the other continually. Likewise, but conversely, the Unitarian approach upholds a particular interpretation of the Old Testament, the Jewish view that God is one Person only. It then proceeds to force any conflicting New Testament evidence to fit its Procrustean bed by any means necessary. In turn, this approach to the hermeneutics (systematic interpretation) of Scripture denies progressive revelation by implicitly assuming that if a given doctrine is taught in Scripture, it is revealed equally clearly throughout the Word of God. But suppose that God, for whatever mysterious purposes of His own, left the multiplicity of the Godhead shrouded in the Old Testament (cf. I Cor. 13:12), but made it clear in the New. If a Unitarian exalts the Old Testament far above the New for the nature of God, thinks no progressive revelation exists on this issue, employs texts that lack the clarity commonly thought (such as Deut. 6:4's use of "echad" for "one"), reads a preconceived definition of "one" into them (i.e., as one Person), assumes the Jews couldn't be wrong when interpreting their own Holy Word, and uses every ad hoc "explanation" conceivable to evade New Testament texts that falsify his doctrine, self-deception can be the only end for this kind of hermeneutics.

## SHADES OF DARRELL CONDER?

One of the most problematic features of Fakhoury's scholarship is revealed by his essay's footnotes to John Hick's The Myth of God Incarnate, a standard mainline liberal Protestant work. Hick's work, like many other liberal Protestant works, relies on the discredited Werde-Boussett-Reitzenstein thesis.<sup>14</sup> Briefly summarized, it claims that first-century Christianity was a pagan mystery religion (like Mithraism) proclaiming yet another dying savior-god (here, Jesus of Nazareth) for gentiles to embrace, but clothed with Jewish and Old Testament conceptions that obscured the underlying Hellenistic reality. As this interpretation of Christianity became popular in the early twentieth century among liberal scholars, it affected their interpretation of the New Testament. Before coming into vogue, the nineteenth-century liberal Protestants who attacked Trinitarianism in the name of Unitarianism labored long and hard to prove the Bible didn't teach the Deity of Christ. Even to this day, Jehovah's Witnesses still use the same arguments that these scholars devised over a century ago. But, with the rise of the Werde-Boussett-Reitzenstein thesis, liberal scholarship switched gears. Instead of

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<sup>14</sup>Buzzard's citation of J. Harold Ellens viewpoint, "Thinking of a human as being God was strictly a Greek or Hellenistic notion," may reflect the influence of this thesis as well. Anthony Buzzard, "What is the Nature of Preexistence in the New Testament?," The Journal, Sept. 28, 1998, p. 11.

denying that the New Testament taught that Jesus was God, they readily admitted this, in order to find evidence that Jesus was just another "dying savior-god." Hence, by tying Biblical Christianity's core belief to Rome's pagan mystery religions, the liberals unearthed a seemingly powerful argument to bury Biblical Christianity with. Now, clearly, Fakhoury totally denies the claims of the Werde-Boussett-Reitzenstein thesis, which presently directly menaces the Church of God in the form of Darrell Conder's Mystery Babylon and the Ten Lost Tribes in the End Times.<sup>15</sup> But this idea that the word "God" shouldn't be taken to mean "God," but rather has some lesser, weaker meaning like "divine hero," etc., plainly has its intellectual roots in the Werde-Boussett-Reitzenstein thesis, which John Hick's work, among many other liberal works, certainly relies upon.<sup>16</sup> Since this well of scholarship is so clearly spiritually poisoned, whatever concepts we draw from it should be drunk with the utmost caution. The mere fact that the Hebrew meaning for the words "el" and "elohim" in a very few cases does not refer to the Almighty God or a pagan deity doesn't mean we are free to read the "weak" definition into any texts referring to Christ whenever they can't be "explained away" otherwise. The main, standard meaning should be assumed to apply, unless otherwise proven, especially when Scripture won't allow a "watered-down" definition of "God" to be applied to the one true God in any shape or form.

## THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS DESCRIBE A DIVINE MESSIAH

Hence, when Fakhoury cites Brown, Driver & Briggs or Gesenius as using a "weak" definition of "God" for Isa. 9:6, it's quite possible standard liberal or anti-Christian prejudices influence their choices for what definition of "el" was meant in this text. After all, in the broad, cosmopolitan Hellenistic/Roman ancient world, if Jesus was a pagan savior-god like Attis or Mithras, then calling him a "mighty hero" would make perfect sense, even if it (on some level) mistakenly reads a pagan Greek idea back into the

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<sup>15</sup>Five key books proving the show falsity of Conder's thesis, which originally derived from liberal Protestantism: J. Gresham Machen, The Origin of Paul's Religion (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965); Seyoon Kim, The Origin of Paul's Gospel (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981); Edwin M. Yamauchi, Pre-Christian Gnosticism (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1983); R.N. Ridderbos, Paul and Jesus (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1952); F.F. Bruce, Jesus & Christian Origins Outside the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982). My specific rebuttals against Conder's claims, "Is Christianity a Fraud?" and "Round Two!," are available at the UCG--Ann Arbor website ([www.io.com/~ucgaa./ucgaa.html](http://www.io.com/~ucgaa./ucgaa.html)) and Alan Ruth's ([biblestudy.org](http://biblestudy.org)).

<sup>16</sup>Morey, The Trinity, pp. 207-10, 315-17, 348. For a general critique of the claims that first-century Christianity's doctrinal content came from pagan religion and philosophy, see Ronald H. Nash, The Gospel and the Greeks: Did the New Testament Borrow From Pagan Thought? (Richardson, TX: Probe Books, 1992). A general rebuttal of Hick's work is Michael Green, ed., The Truth of God Incarnate (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977). In the 1970s, this book (which Hick edited) created an enormous uproar in the Anglican Church in England.

Hebrew Scriptures. But nowadays, what upsets the liberal applecart are the Dead Sea Scroll discoveries that shows that the Qumran sect believed the coming Messiah would be not just the son of God, but God as well. Consider this amazing excerpt from a text found in Cave #4:

He will be great over the earth . . . all will worship him. . . . He shall be called great and he will be designated by his name. He will be called "Son of God" and they will call Him "Son of the Most High". . . . His kingdom will be an eternal kingdom [cf. Isa. 9:7 and Luke 1:32-33, 35], and all His paths in truth and uprightness. . . . The sword shall cease from the land and all the provinces shall pay him homage. He is a great God of gods [cf. Dan. 2:47]. . . . His kingdom will be an eternal kingdom, and none of the abysses of the earth shall prevail against it.<sup>17</sup>

Clearly, the word "God" in the term "a great God of gods" can't be downgraded to "divine hero." Furthermore, this writing destroys liberal scholarship's claims about Jewish monotheism having no idea that the Messiah was divine, which shows it wasn't a pagan idea that Paul and/or the early Catholic Church Fathers imported into early Christianity. Hence, if ancient Judaism was willing to call the Messiah "a great God of gods," Fakhoury's claim that "we see that in no case do the Hebrew Scriptures teach that the Messiah would be God" becomes exceedingly implausible.

## THE PHILOSOPHICAL AND HISTORICAL PROBLEMS WITH ARIANISM

### HISTORICALLY, ARIANISM BASED ON PAGAN PHILOSOPHY

Historically, one of the major reasons why Arius (260-336 A.D.) denied that the Son had eternally co-existed with the Father was because he applied Plato's concept of the indivisible monas to God the Father as he interpreted Scripture. Plato also considered the attributes of the indivisible Monas, or First Cause, to be incommunicable, meaning they couldn't be shared with any other entity outside of itself. Following this logic, Arius denied the Son had the attributes of the Father, such as eternity and omniscience. He placed the Son (whom he labeled the "duas," another Platonic term) between the created world and God as a kind of demigod, who was neither fully God nor only man. Arius' concept of Jesus clearly is similar to Plato's portrayal of the Demiurge in his dialog the Timaeus. The Demiurge is the semi-divine actual creator of the material universe, but his attributes were finite, not infinite. It has to be remembered that Arius was part of the same syncretistic Alexandrine school of theologians that the influential yet borderline heterodox Catholic Father Origen (c. 185-254 A.D.) was in. Undeniably, Origen's thought was heavily influenced by pagan philosophy (especially neo-Platonism) in ways even Catholics later denounced. For

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<sup>17</sup>my emphasis, 4QAramaic Apocalypse [4Q246] col. I:7-9; Col. II:1,5-8; as cited by Morey, The Trinity, pp. 228-29.

example, like the Hindus and Mormons, he believed in the soul's pre-existence, which the last section of Plato's Republic also contains. He believed in the eternal cycles of the creation and destruction of future worlds, that Satan would ultimately repent, and even the eternal existence of spiritual intellects/beings who weren't God.<sup>18</sup> Given this pagan philosophical background, Arianism clearly wasn't the majority viewpoint, despite Wade Cox's claims to the contrary. In such early post-New Testament writings by the early apostolic Catholic Church Fathers Clement and Ignatius (an emphatic Sunday-keeper executed by Rome c. 110 A.D.), Jesus is undeniably called God. The traditional Christians who inserted interpolations into the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha plainly believed Jesus was God as well. The mere fact Arius' contentions produced such an enormous uproar shows that he was attacking an established consensus in the Sunday-keeping church about Jesus being God. Thanks to the discovery of manuscripts of Arius' own writings, it's now clear that pagan philosophy influenced his interpretations of Scripture. Instead of being a reassertion of strict Judaic monotheism, Arianism was even more paganized and Hellenistic than Trinitarian theology. As Gonzalez correctly notes:

The Hellenizing tendency of Arianism was constantly manifested in the course of the controversy, when its leaders repeatedly appealed to the arguments drawn from philosophical speculation, while the Nicene theologians--and especially Athanasius [the leading defender of the Nicene creed], as will be seen in the following chapter--usually took Christian soteriology [salvation theology] as their point of departure. . . . Therefore, the result of the controversy is not, as has sometimes been claimed, the victory of a Hellenized Christianity over another more primitive and Judaic understanding of the faith, but the setting of a limit, by a moderately Hellenized Christianity, to the exaggerated influence of philosophical speculation on Christian theology.<sup>19</sup>

The historical evidence shows that Arians can't claim that their doctrine originated in Scripture alone.<sup>20</sup>

## WILL THE REAL POLYTHEISTS PLEASE STAND UP?

As noted above, Arianism in its original form placed Jesus as a semi-divine creature, as not-quite-God, yet not only a man either. The question Robert Bowman

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<sup>18</sup>Justo L. Gonzalez, A History of Christian Thought, vol. 1, From the Beginnings to the Council of Chalcedon (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1970), pp. 226-233.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 298.

<sup>20</sup>Morey, Trinity, pp. 454-65; 469-78. Morey refers to G.C. Stead, "The Platonism of Arius," JTS, n.s., 15 (1964), pp. 16-37; Robert Gregg, ed., Arianism: Historical and Theological Reassessments (Philadelphia: Patristic Foundation, 1985), pp. 1-58.

raised, borrowed to serve as a subheading above, concerns why Arianism is not true monotheism. If Jesus is a "Mighty God" (Isa. 9:6) and "a god" (John 1:1, NWT), but not a false pagan god, Arianism has two Gods. The Father is a "big" God, and the Son is a little "god," and so  $1 + 1 = 2$ !<sup>21</sup> The Binitarian avoids this problem by asserting the Father and Son are both fully God, and that They make up the one true God. But an Arian can't do this, since he has to assert that Jesus is not God, yet he won't deny the texts that show Jesus' status ranks far above any other created beings, thus leaving Jesus in limbo as a kind of demigod. To an Arian, Jesus has to be considered a true "god," but not the true Almighty God (the Father), thus making for an effective polytheism. Wade Cox reflects this, since his position amounts to a type of polytheism, or at least henotheism (a religion in which only one God is worshipped, but which asserts that other gods exist): "Now, unless Moses, the psalmists, Christ, John and Paul were complete liars, there must be multiple elohim. This fact we also know from Hebrew texts, where elohim is a generic plural term. These beings were not the one true God. . . . It also appears beyond dispute that the terms elohim, yahovah, and adonai are plural and apply to multiple beings who are not the one true God and who are also described as angels." Ironically, even Fakhoury gives in to this historic tendency of Arianism by suggesting that if Jesus was the creator and preexisted, "He could conceivably have been a divine person included in the 'us' of Genesis 1:26 and elsewhere." Here a fundamental challenge has to be issued to all Arians: Either Jesus is part of the one true God, or He isn't. If you wish to be a strict monotheist who insists God is one Person, you can't have Jesus haphazardly floating around in status between a God being and a mere man only. God is one, not one and a half. If Jesus spoke the words, "Let Us make man in Our image according to Our likeness," He is 100% God since the Hebrew text says "elohim," since the Creator, a defining attribute of God, said these words. One can't parse "elohim" here to mean at the same time both the True God, the Creator, and other non- or semi-divine being(s), especially when the angels are never asserted in Scripture to be the creators of the universe. Either adopt the Binitarian view, which assimilates the Father and Son together into one God in two Persons, or become a Unitarian who totally rejects Jesus as being divine by reasoning that God is one because He is only one Person. If indeed, "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is One!," it can't be Jesus sometimes is "God" and sometimes isn't, if the Father is the only one true God.

## WAS JESUS A DEMIGOD?

Historically, one of the major reasons why Arianism lost to Trinitarianism in the decades following the Council of Nicea (325 A.D.) was because it turned Jesus into a

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<sup>21</sup>The question comes from chapter 4 of Robert M. Bowman Jr., Why You Should Believe in the Trinity: An Answer to Jehovah's Witnesses (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), p. 49; For the mathematical example, see Gordon E. Duggar, Jehovah's Witnesses: Watch Out for the Watchtower! (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985), p. 66.

demigod, as Gonzalez explains:

But one could also see in the inner nature of Arianism one of the main causes of its defeat. Arianism can be interpreted as an attempt to introduce within Christianity the custom of worshiping beings which, while not being the absolute God himself, were divine in a relative sense. The general Christian conscience reacted strongly against this limited understanding of the Savior's divinity, as was clearly seen every time the Arians expressed their doctrine in its extreme fashion. . . . Besides, the Arian intent of producing such a paganized Christianity by allowing the worship of a being that was not quite God himself had strong competition in popular piety that was already beginning to follow the custom--no less pagan, but certainly less detrimental to the divinity of Christ than Arianism--of rendering to the saints a type of worship similar to that which antiquity offered to demigods.<sup>22</sup>

Contrary to Wade Cox's claims that Arianism (a term he opposes) was the original faith of the church, in fact "the destruction of the faith by the Greeks and Romans" would have come even faster had the paganized theology of Arius been accepted by the Sunday-keeping church. The first public record of Arius' teachings implies its dissident nature, since it arose when he objected to a sermon by Bishop Alexander of Alexandria that stressed the coeternity of the Father and the Son in 318 A.D. Since Arius was reacting against orthodoxy, it shows orthodoxy existed before Arianism did. Bishop Alexander's letter to Alexander of Thessalonica confirms this, for in it he complained that Arius was "attacking the orthodox faith," was denouncing "every apostolic doctrine," and was denying "the deity of the Savior."<sup>23</sup>

## THE NEW TESTAMENT TEXTUAL EVIDENCE FOR THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST REEXAMINED

### WAS JESUS "a god"?

By citing George Eldon Ladd, Fakhoury refers to an argument that has been the main way Jehovah's Witnesses have sought to explain away John 1:1. (To refute this superficially plausible interpretation of the Greek unfortunately involves a great deal of explanation which some readers may wish to skip over). They claim that the Word is a lesser being than the Father because the word "the" (the article) is omitted from before the word "God." Hence, their New World Translation reads, "and the Word was a god."

Ladd's claim that "God is more than the Word" is fatally wounded by this objection: It turns Jesus into a demigod who isn't quite God Almighty, but who isn't just an average

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<sup>22</sup>Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, vol. 1, p. 297.

<sup>23</sup>Morey, *The Trinity*, pp. 469-70. Of course, by "orthodoxy," Trinitarianism is meant.

man either, an issue already covered thoroughly above. Since God is one, not sometimes one, sometimes one and a half, applying a "weak" definition of "God" to the one true God conflicts with the rest of Scripture, so it must be rejected. Although admitting for purely grammatical reasons the third clause of John 1:1 could be translated, "the Word was a god," Harris explains the insufferable objection to this translation:

But the theological context, viz., John's monotheism, makes this rendering of 1:1c impossible, for if a monotheist were speaking of the Deity he himself revered, the singular ["theos"] could only be applied to the Supreme Being, not to an inferior divine being or emanation as if ["theos"] were simply generic. That is, in reference to his own beliefs, a monotheist could not speak of ["theoi," gods] nor could he use ["theos"] in the singular (when giving any type of personal description) of any being other than the one true God whom he worshipped.

Although he says "a god" is a correct translation in Acts 28:6, this is because the NT here reports what the pagan Maltans called Paul for surviving a poisonous snake's bite.<sup>24</sup> Hence, the Arians' middle-of-the-road position is not acceptable: Either Jesus is fully 100% God by origin, or else He is only a man.

#### DOES OMITTING THE ARTICLE BEFORE THE WORD "GOD" PROVE MUCH?

Does the omission of the article (in English, the words "the," "a," or "an") in the third clause of John 1:1 really prove all that much? As Harris notes, "From three converging lines of evidence it becomes abundantly clear that in NT usage ["the God"] and ["God"] are often interchangeable." For example, when Paul writes, "For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:11), it would be absurd to translate "theos" here as "a god." The genitive form (meaning, a form of the word "God" that changes its ending because the word for "of" is built into its ending), "theou," could be translated "of a god" whenever it appears for it to be consistent with the Jehovah's Witnesses' rendering of John 1:1. Yet, with some examination (John 1:6, 12, 13; Romans 1:7, 17; Matthew 5:9; 6:24; Luke 1:35, 78), this argument is exposed as the purest poppycock.<sup>25</sup> Harris draws particular attention to Romans 1:21, which refers to "the God" before mentioning "God" without the article. Note the immediately preceding verse as well, which draws attention to God's divine essence and attributes (or qualities) as being revealed by the natural world He created:

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<sup>24</sup>Harris, Jesus as God, p. 60. However, Harris seems to concede too much to the enemy here. See Bowman's insightful comment below about the word "god" being the problem (the small "g"), not "a God" (the absence or presence of the article).

<sup>25</sup>Walter Martin and Norman Klann, Jehovah of the Watchtower (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1981), p. 49.



"For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew [the] God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened." An additional text showing that "theos" in Greek without the article takes on the connotation of referring to God's essential and intrinsic attributes, as opposed to how He acts in history and personally reaches out to humanity, comes from Paul's contrast between the true God and false gods in Gal. 4:8-9: "However, at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?"<sup>26</sup> Each time it appears in these two verses, the word for "God" lacks the article (is anarthrous). Yet, nobody would assert that the article's absence in these two verses means a "weak" definition ("divine hero" or other such blather) of "God" would be correct.

## DOES COLWELL'S RULE APPLY TO JOHN 1:1'S THIRD CLAUSE?

The question, "Why does the word "God" lack the article in John 1:1?," Morey properly sees as a prejudiced question. It is prejudicial because of the a priori weight of Colwell's rule 20, which maintains that "when a noun is taken out of its normal order and placed before its verb, 97% of the time it does not have the article" (Morey).<sup>27</sup> Given this fact, the burden of proof is on those trying to assert the article should have been present, not on those saying its absence is to be expected. Furthermore, as John Wheeler has observed, if one back-translates the Greek into Hebrew, the absence of the article makes perfect sense.<sup>28</sup> Notice that the third clause of John 1:1 has a word order that's the opposite of the standard English translation: It literally reads "and God was the Word," thus placing the predicate (what is being asserted about the subject) before the subject (who or what is being spoken of). Colwell explains how his rule applies to John 1:1 thus:

A definite predicate nominative has the article when it follows the verb; it does not have the article when it precedes the verb. . . . The opening verse of John's Gospel contains one of the many passages where this rule suggests the translation of a predicate as a definite noun [i.e., not as a quality or attribute, such as "divinity"]. The absence of the article (before theos) does not make the predicate indefinite or qualitative when it precedes the verb; it is indefinite in this position only when the context demands it. The context makes no such demand in the Gospel of John, for this statement cannot be regarded as strange in the prologue of the

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<sup>26</sup>Harris, Jesus as God, pp. 37-39.

<sup>27</sup>Morey, The Trinity, p. 324.

<sup>28</sup>Personal communication, December 1998.

gospel which reaches its climax in the confession of Thomas.<sup>29</sup>

Harris opposes the application of Colwell's rule to John 1:1 for two reasons: (1) He believes John omitted the article in the third clause to make sure a reader didn't mistakenly believe the Father and the Son were the same Person. (2) He doesn't believe asserting a quality, attribute, or characteristic about something ("qualitative") and asserting something falls into a certain category, species, or group of objects with a common name ("definite") are mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, as pointed out above, Harris believes in most cases the absence or presence of the article before the word "God" makes little or no difference in meaning, with a few exceptions, such as Romans 1:21 and (for him) John 1:1. Harris' line of reasoning contains force, but it doesn't overthrow a potentially limited, oblique application to this verse of Colwell's rule, which describes on an empirical basis how word order in sentences affects whether the article meaning "the" in Greek is absent or present. Colwell's rule merely describes what is to be expected in the average or typical sentence based on standard usage of Greek, not what must be the case or must be the meaning. It may not be a controlling or determining rule that "forces" the writer to write in a certain way here in order for a sentence to "sound" right, but it's not irrelevant either since it describes what is to be expected under normal circumstances. Similarly, the makers of English dictionaries (lexicographers) report what the average definitions or pronunciations of words are, not what they ought to be, based on empirical research of what thousands of people have written in print and/or have spoken in public in previous decades and centuries. Hence, this puts us back in the same territory as is the case in applying (see below) the Granville Sharp rule to Titus 2:13 and I Peter 1:1: Do we go with the usual or expected in meaning based on the standard rules of grammar, or insist on holding out for something strange based upon preconceived theology? Harris' denial of the application of Colwell's rule to John 1:1 provides cold comfort to Arianism anyway, since it's partially based on asserting the word "God" is used both qualitatively and definitely of the word "Word." But since standard word order in Greek indicates that the article is usually omitted when the predicate appears before the subject, the burden of proof is on those claiming John asserted the Word had a limited divinity, not on those who believe John stated that the Word was fully God.

#### WHY WOULD JOHN OMIT THE ARTICLE IN JOHN 1:1'S THIRD CLAUSE?

Although the omission of the article before the word "God" may mean the term "God" is being used to emphasize the divine quality or essence of the Being so designated, that Being so designated is still God. As Martin and Klann write: "It is nonsense to say that a simple noun can be rendered "divine," and that an anarthrous noun conveys merely the idea of quality. . . . [Jehovah's Witnesses] themselves later

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<sup>29</sup>as cited by Bruce M. Metzger, The Jehovah's Witnesses and Jesus Christ (Princeton, NJ: Theological Book Agency, 1953), p. 75; as found in McDowell and Larson, Jesus, p. 29.

render the same noun Theos as 'a god' not as 'a quality' [such as "divinity."] This is a self-contradiction in the context."<sup>30</sup> Although tackling the text somewhat differently, Harris explains that, while demurring against applying Colwell's rule here:

Colwell wrongly assumes that definiteness and qualitiveness are mutually exclusive categories, that if [theos] can be shown to be definite because of principles of word order, it cannot be qualitative in sense. In the expression ["pneuma o theos," that is, "God is [a] spirit"] (John 4:24), for example, [pneuma, i.e., spirit] is both definite (referring to a specific genus [i.e., category]) and qualitative (denoting a distinctive quality or inherent characteristic).

It's illegitimate to read the modern-day vagueness of the word "divine" (which would allow for a "weak" definition of "God" here) into what John could have meant by "theos" in the third clause of John 1:1; "Deity" makes for a better translation in present-day English, if "God" is rejected. As Harris notes, "In modern parlance, for instance, 'divine' may describe a meal that is 'supremely good' or 'fit for a god' or may be used of human patience that is 'God-like' or 'of a sublime character.'" Fakhoury cites Barclay in apparent support of his own position, but Barclay's statement affirms what no Arian or Unitarian can accept, viz., "the word was, we might say, of the very same character and quality and essence and being as God." In his translation of the New Testament, John 1:1 plainly affirms the Deity of Christ: "When the world began, the Word was already there. The Word was with God, and the nature of the Word was the same as the nature of God." When Barclay says the Word was not "identical" with God, he affirms what Harris repeatedly states as the reason why John omits the article: The Father and the Word are not the same Person, but they both are of the same category of being "God." As the latter explains,

In the context of John 1:1, this would have involved an intolerable equation of persons, with the Logos being personally identified, in a convertible proposition [i.e., one that can invert the subject and predicate, yet still be equally true, such as a Hindu saying that "All is God" and "God is all"], with the Father [o theos, "the God"] in v. 1b). Such an affirmation--fitly described as embryonic Sabellianism [the heresy that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are the same Person, similar to modern-day "oneness" Pentecostalism's teaching]--would contradict the unambiguous clause that immediately precedes: "The Word was with [o theos, "the God"]." Whatever John's word order, [o theos] would have been inappropriate in verse 1c, given the immediate context.<sup>31</sup>

So in the second clause, John uses "God" as the personal name of the Father, but then

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<sup>30</sup>Martin and Klann, Jehovah of the Watchtower, p. 51.

<sup>31</sup>Harris, Jesus as God, pp. 62, 63, 64, 67, 68, 69.

in the third clause, he used "God" to refer to the divine essence or nature, which is said to describe the Word. For example, if someone said, "Smith is Jones," this statement's terseness could make it seem they are confusing two separate persons who are both human (of the same essence, who are in the same category or species). If not a mistake, this statement would be convertible, which means "Jones is Smith" is equally true. If true, it then would have to refer to the same Person, such as a woman whose maiden name was "Barbara Jones," but whose married name is "Barbara Smith." Since John wanted to avoid implying the Father was the same Person as the Son, he omitted the article.

## DOES THE OMISSION OF "THE" IN GREEK PROVE "GOD" CHANGES IN MEANING?

Bowman effectively demolishes the claim by Ladd (and others!) that the omission of the article in the third clause of John 1:1 "implies that God is more than the Word." For example, when the same grammatical construction appears elsewhere in the New Testament, is a "weaker" meaning of the predicate implied when it precedes the subject? For example, the NWT has in Luke 20:38: "He is a God, not of the dead, but of the living, for they are all living to him." In the Greek, the word "God" has no article in front of it, but in translation it's inserted since it makes for much better English. Does its absence in the Greek make "the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (v. 37) a demigod who isn't fully divine? Similarly, "a ghost" would be fully a ghost when the disciples thought they saw one (Mark 6:49). Satan is as fully "a manslayer" and fully "a liar" as anybody has been (John 8:44). Furthermore, whenever this grammatical construction (the predicate precedes the subject while the article is omitted) appears using the word for God, the one true Almighty God is meant, not some limited divinity (see John 8:54; Phil. 2:13; Heb. 11:16; Luke 20:38). Furthermore, there are texts where the word for "God," "theos," appears twice, once with the article and once without, with little or no shift in meaning (John 3:2; 13:3; Rom. 1:21;<sup>32</sup> I Thess. 1:9; Heb. 9:14; I Peter 4:10-11). In these texts, whether it is "the God" or "God," the one Almighty God is meant in each case. So how could such an enormous shift in meaning supposedly erupt between John 1:1's second and third clauses? Consequently, Bowman maintains the main problem with the Jehovah's Witness translation of "a god" for "theos" in the third clause of John 1:1 is the small "g," not the article being omitted or added.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps "the god of this world" (II Cor. 4:4) has blinded Arians and Unitarians

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<sup>32</sup>The shift in meaning Harris sees in this verse's two uses of "theos" is a mere tremor compared to the earthquake change Arians want to read into John 1:1. This verse concerns how God is known, not what God is, and the writer emphasizes the quality of being God, as opposed to referring to God as being a member of a group of beings or entities.

<sup>33</sup>Bowman, Why You Should Believe in the Trinity, pp. 92-94.

into believing the omission of the article before the word "theos" in the third clause of John 1:1 proves Jesus wasn't fully Divine.

## ARE THE JEWS THAT DENSE?

In order to avoid the witness of such texts as John 10:30-33 and John 8:58-59 for the Deity of Christ, Fakhoury's explanation is that the Jews misunderstood Jesus. How is it known that they misunderstood Jesus? It's assumed a priori that the Old Testament almost uniformly reveals God to be one Person. So when Jesus says anything that causes the Jews to accuse Him of making claims to divinity, it's said that their accusations can't be true in any shape or form. But let's take a more open-minded approach. This argument's fundamental flaw is if someone allows others to think he is God when he isn't, and he fails to correct it immediately, he is abominably negligent morally. Since Christ's character was so much higher than our own, an immediate and clear correction would have been morally required had others falsely thought that He was claiming to be God. Undeniably, Jesus could attack clearly the errors and misunderstandings of His listeners when in debate or dialog with them, such as when Peter thought He wouldn't be crucified (Matt. 16:22-23) or when arguing with the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matt. 22:15-46). He corrected misunderstandings about how to keep the Sabbath when confronted with them (Luke 6:1-10; Mark 2:23-28). Importantly, when the Jews were wrong on something, frequently it involved a misplaced emphasis or wrong spiritual priorities within a list of requirements to obey God, not complete error (Matt. 23:23; Mark 7:5-13). Furthermore, three times in the Bible after someone mistakenly started worshiping someone else falsely, he was (or they were) immediately corrected. When Cornelius "fell at his feet," Peter told him, "Stand up; I too am just a man" (Acts 10:25-26). Having been overwhelmed by the visions he had received through one angel, John "fell down to worship at the feet of the angel." But the angel replied to him, "Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book; worship God" (Rev. 22:8-9). After the pagans of Lystra misidentified Paul and Barnabas as the gods coming down to earth as men, they brought sacrifices out to offer to them. In response, Paul and Barnabas tore their clothes and cried out to the crowd, "Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you in order that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them" (Acts 14:11, 14-15). These were immediate, clear corrections, not implicit acceptances or "sidesteps" that partially changed the subject. Hence, since Jesus failed to correct the misunderstandings of the Jews concerning His own identity, but was willing to correct them on just about everything else they had wrong (Matt. 23!), the accusations of the Jews can only be seen as correct. Jesus didn't make His divine claims even more clear because He didn't want to be taken before His time (cf. John 2:4; 7:6, 8, 30; 8:40). Since the Jews were quick to pick up stones to throw at Him for committing seeming blasphemy (John 8:59; 10:31-32), there was no need to tempt fate unnaturally.

## RATIONALIZING THE THROWING OF STONES AT JESUS

It's a rationalization to say the Jews were trying to stone Jesus for asserting He was just a greater human than Abraham in John 8:53, 58-59 since the reasons to stone someone under the law were clear and narrow. Notice that Jesus' repeated denunciations of the Pharisees never resulted in a stoning threat, including when He called them "sons of vipers" destined for the Lake of Fire (Matt. 23:33). A person could be stoned for having a spirit (Lev. 20:27), cursing (blasphemy) (Lev. 24:10-23), false prophesying (Deut. 13:5-10), being a disobedient, stubborn son (Deut. 21:18-21), and the sexual sins of committing adultery and rape (Deut. 22:21-24; Lev. 20:10).<sup>34</sup> True, the Jews accused Jesus of demon possession (John 8:48, 52). This Jesus plainly denied (v. 49). The final trigger was Jesus' statement "before Abraham was born, I am" in v. 58, making it clear blasphemy was why they stoned him. Fakhoury claims that Jesus was merely saying He was older than Abraham (which ironically undercuts his interpretation of John 1:1 as an allegory since it concedes Jesus pre-existed literally, not just mentally in the mind of God). But had Jesus only meant this, no stoning threats would have come His way, since asserting that He was older than Abraham wasn't blasphemous, but merely (seemingly) eccentric. For Jesus to say lived before Abraham did, who had lived some 2000 years earlier, still reflected a question about His true identity, since no possible ordinary human could have lived that long before. Neither in John 8:58-59 nor in John 10:30-39 did Jesus issue an equally plain denial that He was God, despite it would have instantly defused the second incident. Furthermore, as Bowman observes, the Gospel of John is full of Jesus making "I am" statements of unusual significance (John 4:26; 6:35, 48, 51; 8:12, 24, 28, 58; 10:7, 11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1, 5; 18:5, 6, 8). It's logical to conclude these statements are tied to one another thematically, so to translate John 8:58 as "I have been" robs it of its apparent tie to these other texts. The contrast between Abraham's coming into existence and Jesus' "I am" of self-existence is paralleled by Psalms 90:2, which compares the mountains' coming into existence with God's eternal existence: "Before the mountains were born . . . from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God."<sup>35</sup> As Morey observes, the Greek words translated "I am," "ego eimi," are undeniably in the present indicative. If Jesus had merely meant that He had existed before Abraham, He easily could have used the imperfect tense, "I was." Claiming that Jesus used the historical present (which uses a present tense in order to make a description of a past event more vivid) is not persuasive, because this grammatical construction is found in narratives, not dialogs and debates, as in John 8.<sup>36</sup> Since Jesus nearly got stoned for saying "ego eimi," it's simply not convincing to believe those listening thought He merely meant "I have existed" instead of "I am that I am."

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<sup>34</sup>Walter Martin and Norman Klann, Jehovah of the Watchtower, p. 52.

<sup>35</sup>Bowman, Why You Should Believe in the Trinity, pp. 99-101.

<sup>36</sup>Morey, The Trinity, pp. 364-65.

## SHOULD DOCTRINE CAUSE US TO REJECT SHARP'S RULE WHEN INCONVENIENT?

Ultimately, should doctrine determine grammar, or grammar doctrine? Shouldn't the standard, normal meaning of terms and words be controlling, unless the text's context in Scripture indicates otherwise? There are a number of texts bearing heavily favoring the Deity of Christ for grammatical and syntactical reasons. Of course, an inventive Arian or Unitarian can always find an escape hatch or secret passage through any barrier or wall a Binitarian may erect. But if rationality is going to prevail when interpreting Scripture, the meaning that's 90-95% likely, not the 5-10% possibility, should be accepted. For example, the following three texts, according to the Granville Sharp rule in Greek grammar, should all be references to one Person, not two: "Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus" (Titus 2:13); "By the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (II Pet. 1:1); "In order that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and Lord Jesus Christ (II Thess. 1:12, NASB marg.) This rule of Greek grammar maintains that when two nouns of the same case have the word kai ("and") separating them, if the first noun has the article ("the" or "a") in front of it, but the second noun doesn't, then the sentence refers to only one person. But when both nouns have definite articles in front of them, then they refer to separate persons. Hence, in the literal Greek, Luke 20:37 refers to "The God of Abraham and God of Isaac and God of Jacob." The omission of the articles from the second and third words "God" shows that only one God is meant, not three. As Greek scholar A.T. Robertson observed about II Thess. 1:12: "Here strict syntax requires, since only one article with theou and kuriou that one person be meant, Jesus Christ, as is certainly true in Titus 2:13; II Pet. 1:1." Further contextual or cultural clues strengthen the syntactical weight of Sharp's rule for two of these texts. For example, Titus 2:13 uses a stereotyped formula, "God and Savior," which first-century Jews in Palestine and the Diaspora routinely used. Furthermore, even pagans employed it to refer to their kings, such as the Egyptian Ptolemaic formula "tou megalou theou . . . kai soterou," (that is, "the great God and Savior") which obviously only applied to one person/one king. When discussing this text, Harris notes that Ptolemy I was called "Savior and God" and Julius Caesar "God and Savior." Hence, by using this formula, but applying it to Jesus, potentially Paul was pointedly showing, by contrast, who Christians should regard as their God. True, an Arian can play games, and hunt for exceptions to the Granville Sharp rule. Nevertheless, its weight towards meaning grammatically one person was so great in Titus 2:13 that Winer, a Greek scholar, admitted that his doctrinal commitment to Arianism was why he denied that this text referred to one Person! Ironically, for II Pet. 1:1, even Winer had to concede that it referred to one Person! Evidently, since I Pet. 1:3 refers to one Person, "the God and Father," it's highly inconsistent to assert that "Our God and Savior" refers to two! So which will it be? Will grammar determine doctrine, meaning we accept the (say) 95% likelihood, or will we insist on holding out for the 5% possibility, because we are so committed

because of our a priori bias and commitment to some doctrine that we think it can't be refuted by further evidence?<sup>37</sup>

## A DOXOLOGY SHOWS "GOD" MEANS "GOD"

Another hurdle Arians must jump is Romans 9:5: "and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all [cf. Col 1:15-18], God blessed forever. Amen." Since this text is a doxology, it is particularly troublesome to Arians and Unitarians, because it can't be evaded by saying "God" doesn't mean "God." Why? A doxology is an expression of praise to God. The word "Amen" ending it indicates it is a form of prayer to God. Some examples are Gal. 1:4-5; Eph. 3:21; Phil. 4:20; I Tim. 1:17, 6:16; I Pet. 4:11, 5:11. Since Scripture indicates that we should only pray to the self-existent, almighty, omniscient God (Ex. 20:2; Matt. 4:10; Deut. 6:12-14), a prayer to Jesus would show He was God in an undiluted sense. In order to evade this text's meaning, Unitarians have engaged in all sorts of word games and creative efforts at punctuation. The principal problem they face is the reality that the Greek words translated "who is" must normally grammatically refer back to the immediate antecedent, which is "Christ." As Robertson notes, "To make a full stop after sarka [flesh] (or colon) and start a new sentence for the doxology is very abrupt and awkward." Similarly, Harris explains:

But the overriding difficulty with this [Unitarian] understanding is that it awkwardly separates [Greek for "the [one] who is"] from its natural antecedent ["the Christ."] . . . So my point stands--that to promote a divorce of ["the [one] who is"] from the grammatical consonant ["the Christ"] is unconscionable. There is also the consideration that in all NT doxologies an explicit link is found between the doxology itself and some preceding word or words; one never find asyndetic [separate, without conjunctions like "and," to some preceding phrase or statement] doxologies.<sup>38</sup>

He then enlists Rom. 1:25 and 11:36 as evidence for this point. In addition, since the word "blessed" comes after "God," it can't mean Paul suddenly broke off and exclaimed, "Blessed be God!" Instead, he meant that Christ is the God whom Christians bless. Furthermore, the New Testament never has a doxology in it without first introducing the Person being referred to. Paul, in Romans 9:5, doesn't even mention the Father in this verse, but the immediately preceding verses refer to Christ (vs. 1, 3). Harris sees another reason why this verse most likely doesn't refer to the Father: With one seeming exception, whenever the word "eulogetos" ("blessed") does appear in an independent or asyndetic doxology in the Greek Bible, this word appears before the name of God, not after (see II Cor. 1:3; Eph. 1:3; I Pet. 1:3). In Rom. 9:5, "blessed" appears after the word "God." The apparent Old Testament exception (in the LXX) in Ps. 67:19-20 is

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<sup>37</sup>Morey, The Trinity, pp. 341-47, 350-54; Harris, Jesus as God, p. 179.

<sup>38</sup>Harris, Jesus as God, pp. 157-58.



simply unpersuasive since it involves a double case of praise being given to God, in which one still is in the otherwise universal word order in which "blessed" appears before the name of God. Clearly, taking a truly peculiar Old Testament case, and applying it to interpret a hotly disputed New Testament verse against standard usage is an extremely suspect exegetical procedure.<sup>39</sup> So although the Arians and Unitarians can devise the usual inventive ad hoc explanations to save their teaching, the main weight of this passage points to Jesus being called God by Paul. So again, do we go with the normal and usual, or do we hold out for the abnormal and rare?

## THE BLOOD OF GOD

A standard rule of textual criticism comes to the fore when examining Acts 20:28: "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." When copying books by hand anciently, a temptation scribes faced was to "correct" strange or seemingly contradictory statements into familiar and clearly non-contradictory statements, believing that some scribe before them had made a mistake. Because Paul's statement about the blood of God is unique, although the term "church of God" appears about ten times in Paul's epistles, it appears very likely that scribes emended "God" to "Lord," or added the latter to the former. The textual evidence in the Critical text is highly divided, since the fourth-century Vaticanus (B) and Sinaiticus (Aleph) have "God," but other of its manuscripts (such as the fifth century Alexandrinus, "C") have "Lord." The usually more reliable Received/Byzantine text has two obviously conflated readings with both "God" and "Lord" appearing, which consequently means on balance, based on textual evidence alone, there's a decisive tilt towards the word "God" originally appearing in the text.<sup>40</sup> But then a separate textual issue arises, with serious

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<sup>39</sup>Harris, Jesus as God, pp. 161-62.

<sup>40</sup>Proving the reliability of the Received Text against Wade Cox's calumnies against it is beyond the basic scope of this essay. It should be noted that the pro-Trinitarian interpolation in John 5:7-8 is found in only TWO quite late Greek manuscripts of the Received Text, but was in most copies of the Latin Vulgate. The main, best argument for the Received/Byzantine text's reliability comes from the simple truth that the early Catholic Church Fathers (but with the notable exception of Origen) mostly quoted from it, not from the Critical Text in the centuries and decades before the two main critical text manuscripts (Sinaiticus and Vaticanus) were copied in the fourth century. For example, the last eleven verses of Mark are quoted in such second-century sources as Papias, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Tertullian (who lived to after 220 A.D.), as well as the Old Latin and Syriac versions. In light of it being so commonly cited elsewhere earlier, why is it sensible to believe that because Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, copied in the fourth century, omit them that therefore Mark didn't write them? To explain the difference of why the Byzantine/Received Text was so much more commonly preserved than the Critical text, Hort claimed that the (Catholic) church made a recension (that is, it edited) the NT's text at Antioch in the fourth century. No direct evidence

implications for the most likely meaning of the text: Did the original read "by [the] blood of his own" or "his own blood"? If it read the first, then it's quite possible to believe (although not necessarily) the phrase has an implied additional word, namely, "Son," so it would read altogether, "to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with the blood of His own [Son]."<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, if the second reading is correct, it would say, "to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood," making this clearly a reference to the Deity of Christ. With this word order, the additional word "Son" or "One" couldn't be assumed to be implied. Since the Critical text contains the former reading, but the Received/Byzantine text mostly includes the latter reading, we should favor the second. Furthermore, as Morey observes, since the New Testament mentions the blood of Jesus elsewhere, but the blood of God is a unique expression, it would make more sense to see some scribe(s) "correcting" a manuscript from "with His blood" to "the blood of His own [Son]." The change may have been motivated by a desire to quell the ancient heresy of Patripassianism, the belief that God the Father died on the stake for our sins, not Jesus. Additional textual evidence that this text read "the blood of God" comes from the early Catholic Church Fathers, who repeatedly used this term, and had clearly derived it from Acts 20:28.<sup>42</sup> Altogether, although an Arian can always find a semi-plausible way to wiggle out of this text, its main weight still comes down on the side of Jesus being plainly called "God" by the apostle Paul. The careful analysis made above, as well as Morey's detailed discussion of these texts, shows Fakhoury's claim that such texts as Acts 20:28, Romans 9:5, Titus 2:13, and II Peter 1:1 "are all disputed on technical grounds and most were long ago abandoned by informed scholars as proofs of Jesus' Deity." Maybe they were "long ago abandoned" by the liberal scholars Fakhoury leans upon, such as John Hick, but Morey and Harris's works analyzing many of these texts show that this sweeping generalization is without foundation.

## JESUS WAS ON THE THRONE OF GOD

As noted above, Fakhoury disposes of Ps. 45:6-7 (which is cited in Hebrews 1:8-9) by saying "God doesn't mean God." Because of the surrounding context in Hebrews 1, this text is one of the strongest proofs of the Deity of Christ in the New Testament. As Fakhoury himself notes, this passage contrasts the Son with the angels: "And of the angels He says, 'Who makes His angels winds [spirits], and His ministers a flame of fire.' But of the Son He says, 'Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever.'" Now, how is the

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for this claim has ever appeared. Ironically, and pointing to a fundamental reliability problem in the Critical text's copying, more significant variations appear within the far fewer manuscripts of the Critical Text than within the far greater number of Received text manuscripts! For a good general (if admittedly polemical) defense of the Received text, see David Otis Fuller, ed., Which Bible? (Grand Rapids, MI: Grand Rapids International Publications, 1975).

<sup>41</sup>This view Harris defends. See Jesus as God, pp. 136-41.

<sup>42</sup>Morey, The Trinity, pp. 330-32.

Son said to be superior to the angels? He is worshiped by the angels (v. 6), and then is called "God" in v. 8 after the writer of Hebrews uses the word "but" to clearly distinguish Jesus ontologically from the angels. Given this context, can one honestly maintain that the word "God" doesn't have its normal meaning here? Suppose Jesus was created, but composed of spirit, like angels are. (Indeed, Jehovah's Witnesses teach that Jesus was Michael the archangel). If so, how would He be different enough from the angels ontologically, that is, in His fundamental substance or being, to justify the writer of Hebrews' drawing such a sharp contrast between the two? How Psalm 45 could refer initially to an evidently human king who later is called "God" in this Psalm was already dealt with above implicitly. This text is a prophetic verse that discusses a human king as a type of the Messiah, so its context doesn't eliminate the word "God" being used of the God of Israel instead of just a human king. The Psalmist moved from a purely human king to discussing the Messiah who would one of his royal descendants, who he labels "God." Just because the king (who is called "God") has a "God" over him (v. 9, "therefore God, Thy God") doesn't any more prove Jesus isn't God than when Jesus said (John 20:17): "'I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.'" Since the Son is under the Father in authority (I Cor. 11:3), it can always be said that He has a "God," over Him, but that doesn't prove He isn't God. (Notice, incidentally, that Hebrews 1:8 has the article before the word "God," which means Arians have to deny implicitly their standard argument about its absence in John 1:1 proving the word "God" merely means "a god" when explaining away Hebrews 1:8).

One standard alternative translation for Hebrews 1:8 is worthy of discussion, which is found in the NWT: "God is your throne forever." But the main weight of the grammatical construction, especially because of the parallelism between the angels and the son indicates both were addressed in succeeding verses (v. 7-8), points to "God" being used as a vocative (i.e., as in the traditional translation), as Lenski notes:

Here we have a vocative even in the Hebrew as well as in the LXX [the Septuagint] and in Hebrews, and only the unwillingness of commentators to have the Son addressed so directly as 'Elohim,' [o theos] (the article with the nominative is used as a vocative), "God," causes the search for a different construction.

Even ignoring the grammatical difficulties that the pro-Arian translation encounters, the context indicates it makes no sense. As Morey asks, "How does such a phrase prove that Jesus has a superior name and nature to the angels?"<sup>43</sup> Hebrews 1:4 says Jesus has "inherited a more excellent name than they," i.e., the angels. So for the Son, in Hebrews 1:2-14, what name is given to Him that makes Him superior to the angels? The only ones available are "God" (from vs. 8-9) and "Lord," a translation from YHWH in

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<sup>43</sup>Lenski, The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistles of James (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1966), p. 54; as cited in Morey, The Trinity, p. 349.

the original Hebrew, in v. 10. Either choice refutes Arianism and Unitarianism.

## JESUS WAS IN "THE FORM OF GOD"

"Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:5-8). Having been the subject of so much scholarly controversy for literally centuries, this passage is the most difficult text to interpret correctly in the New Testament for all those potentially directly referring to Jesus' Deity. A careful, close analysis of the Greek is necessary to understand the nuances of Paul's thought on Jesus' debasement and exaltation serving as a model for Christian conduct today. One key word is "morphe," translated "form" twice in this passage. Does this term only refer to the outward appearance or shape of something, or does it include the underlying reality or essence? An important clue is lent by the word translated "appearance" in v. 8, "schemati," which such scholars as Lightfoot, Trench, Vincent, and Hendriksen maintain refers to the superficial outward appearance, while "morphe" at least implicitly refers to the underlying essence or substance.<sup>44</sup> Consider some evidence for this viewpoint from contrasting v. 6, "the form of God" with v. 7, "the form of a bond-servant." Arians, Unitarians, and Binitarians will all agree that Christ was fully and literally just as much of a human as you are. Hence, when Jesus became "a bond-servant," he was by essence a man, not a ghost who appeared to look like a man, as v. 8 confirms. But then this evident parallelism recoils back against Unitarians and Arians, because if Jesus was "in the form of God" just as much as He was "in the form of a bond-servant," i.e., a man, then Jesus was God. "In the form of God" doesn't mean He merely had the outward shape, appearance, or moral character of God the Father (cf. John 14:9), but had the underlying essence or substance of God as well. As the author of The Expositor's Greek Testament sensibly maintains, the technical use of the word "morphe" found in classical philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle shouldn't be read into Paul's usage here, who was writing to average, unlearned people centuries later in "Koine" Greek. Paul likely used it in a loose popular sense, equivalent to what the word "nature" means to us today. Then consider the implications of the present participle "uparchon," translated "existed" in the NASB above. A literal translation is "existing," which means, according to Rienecker and Roger, a "continuance of an antecedent state or condition." As Hendricksen comments: "The present participle ['uparchon'] stands in sharp contrast with all the aorists [past tenses] which follow it, and therefore points in the direction of continuance of being: Christ Jesus was and is eternally 'in the form of God.'" So when the words for the kenosis theory (i.e., "emptied Himself" of His Deity completely) are examined, the

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<sup>44</sup>Admittedly, this connotation or implication of the word is effectively denied by the Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich (p. 528) and draws divided opinions in Thayer's (p. 418).

present tense of "uparchon" implies He still is (not was) in "the form of God." As Morey explains, "the present participle in such cases is concessive," meaning, the use of the seeming past tense is really about a continuing state that existed in the past but goes on into the present and then into the future.<sup>45</sup> For example, Hebrews 5:8 reveals that, "Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered." Now--did Jesus cease being the Son of God after He learned how to obey from His sufferings? No, since He still is the Son of God now, and will be in the future. A parallel grammatical structure to Phil. 2:6-7 appears in II Cor. 8:9: Christ "though He was [Morey has 'being and remaining to be'] rich, yet for your sake He became poor." The picture being drawn is not that of a rich man who loses all his money and becomes poor, but, says Morey, "a rich man who, while remaining rich, did not take advantage of those riches, but lived among us as a poor man." True, it appears that the word translated as "grasped," "arpagmon" ("robbery" in the KJV) is grammatically ambiguous considered by itself. (See the Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich Greek-English Lexicon, p. 108; Thayer's, p. 74. Fakhoury's claim that "the Greek is unambiguous" in favor of the "snatch" definition is simply not correct). Does "did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped" refer to (1) the act of retaining and holding onto something already possessed, or mean (2) to grab at and seize something not yet owned? In the context, because of the immediate contrasts with the preceding clause, "although He existed in the form of God," and with the succeeding clause, "but emptied Himself," the balance is tilted towards the first interpretation. After all, what did He empty Himself of, unless it was something He already had in some way? Similarly, N.T. Wright remarks: "One cannot decide to take advantage of something one does not already have." So although this Scripture's evident ambiguities gives Arians and Unitarians some more maneuvering room than other texts discussed in this essay, it still appears that the weight of scholarly authority in recent decades has increasingly been arrayed on the side of this text as an affirmation of Jesus' Deity.<sup>46</sup>

## HOW DO WE KNOW WHETHER JESUS ETERNALLY EXISTED?

Now someone might accept that Jesus was "God," but deny His eternal separate pre-existence. What texts show Jesus had always lived before the incarnation? Consider first the messianic prophecy found in Micah 5:2: "But as for you, Bethlehem

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<sup>45</sup>Consider President Clinton's frequently ridiculed discussion of why "is" didn't mean "is" in this light: He asked if the word "is" also included a past relationship with Monica Lewinsky, or just referred to a present time, ongoing relationship.

<sup>46</sup>Fritz Rienecker and Cleon Rogers, Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), p. 550; William Hendriksen, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians (London: Banner, 1963), p. 103, n. 82; The Expositor's Greek Testament, vol. 3, pp. 435-36; N.T. Wright, "arpagmos and the meaning of Philippians 2:5-11, The Best in Theology, ed. J.I. Packer (Carol Stream: Christianity Today, n.d.), vol. 2, p. 101; as quoted in Morey, The Trinity, pp. 336-41.

Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity." Undeniably, at least for Christians, Jesus' birth fulfilled this text (Matt. 2:1-11; cf. John 7:41-42). True, an Arian might assert that the Hebrew word translated "eternity," "olam," doesn't necessarily mean literally "forever." But this objection ignores the passage's climatic parallelism, since the second line amplifies and intensifies the meaning of the first line. The translator of this passage in the Septuagint (LXX) understood it this way, since he translated "from long ago" as "from the beginning" (cf. John 1:1) but "from the days of eternity" as "to days of eternity." Similarly, God's eternal existence is contrasted with the mountains' temporary existence (Ps. 90:2; Hab. 3:6); nobody would dare claim "olam" doesn't literally mean "forever" here! Another text pointing to Jesus' eternal pre-existence is the straightforward interpretation of Hebrews 7:3, which describes the high priest Melchizedek: "Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he abides [present tense!] a priest continually." Here it's now necessary to make the case that Melchizedek was a theophany (an appearance of God to man) of God the Son. Note that Melchizedek is the "king of righteousness." Can any average human have such a name without it being at least presumptuous (cf. Mark 10:18)? Melchizedek is "king of Salem," meaning, the king of peace; Christ was prophesied to be the "Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6). Melchizedek "abides a priest continually." If Melchizedek is still alive, yet we know the dead know nothing (Eccl. 9:5), then Melchizedek can't be an ordinary human who died at some point in the ancient past. Melchizedek is "without father, without mother, without genealogy." Can this be said of any human? The standard rebuttal to this line of reasoning maintains that the writer of Hebrews meant that the records of Melchizedek's ancestry were lost. But consider this more carefully: If you were adopted, but all records of your birth and adoption were lost, could you really be described as being "without father, without mother"? It's absurd! Now it's been argued that this terminology is a kind of Jewish idiomatic phrase for someone whose family tree is untraceable. Only upon the production of examples from (say) the Talmud or Midrashim should anyone consider repudiating this argument. Until otherwise so shown, a literal interpretation of Hebrews 7:3 proves the Being who became Jesus was self-existent, and had no father or mother at this point in His existence. So if Jesus has no end of life after His resurrection, He couldn't have a beginning either in the period before time itself was created.<sup>47</sup> Finally, consider the implications of John 1:1: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Who was "in the beginning"? God? No--it was "the Word." If God created Jesus, why is Jesus mentioned first? If Jesus was a mere plan or thought

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<sup>47</sup>Further oblique evidence that eternal Sonship/generation is false comes from Melchizedek being said to be "like the Son of God." In the time of Abraham, the Word was not yet "the Son of God" because He had not yet been born of the Virgin Mary. For more on Melchizedek being Jesus, see the reprint article by Herbert W. Armstrong, "The Mystery of Melchizedek Solved!," 1956, 1972.

in the Father's mind, why does John open his Gospel by referring to Jesus? Again, using the kind of theological deductive reasoning Morey advocates, if I were a Arian or a Unitarian, and I wrote the Gospel of John, I would start it, "In the beginning was God," not, "In the beginning was the Word," since God existed before Jesus. Furthermore, the imperfect past tense of "en," translated "was" in the first clause, implies Jesus already was in existence when the beginning began. As Rienecker and Rogers maintain: "The imperf. expresses continuous timeless existence (Bernard), and is contrasted with ['egeneto'--'came to be'] of v.3 (Barrett)."<sup>48</sup> As the above evidence shows, Micah 5:2, Hebrews 7:3, and John 1:1 point to Jesus having an eternal pre-existence, which would make Him God by definition.

## COUNTER-ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE DEITY OF CHRIST ANALYZED

### PSALMS 110:1 AND CHRIST BEING "ADONI"

In their article in The Journal, Sir Anthony Buzzard and Charles Hunting argue that since the Hebrew word in Ps. 110:1 translated "Lord" in reference to Christ was "adoni," Christ couldn't be God. In what may be the single most frequently cited Old Testament Messianic text in the New Testament, David wrote: "The Lord [Yahweh] says to my Lord [Adoni]: 'Sit at my right hand, until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet.'" They reason that Jesus couldn't be God, since "adoni" refers to "in every one of its 195 occurrences, human (and occasionally angelic) superiors."<sup>49</sup> This argument runs into an insufferable weakness, however: The only difference between "adoni" and "adonai" is one of vowel pointing, as Buzzard and Hunting themselves point out. Since Hebrew originally was written only in consonants, the vowel points were added later, probably in the sixth or seventh centuries A.D. Neither Jerome in the fourth century (who translated the Latin Vulgate) nor the Talmud in the fifth century mention them, despite "both at times discuss in detail different vocalization possibilities of Hebrew consonants . . . It is inconceivable that had such signs existed Jerome and the rabbis should have failed to mention them." Since three different schools of writing the vowels and accents developed among the Jews (the Babylonian, the Palestian, and the Tiberian, which triumphed over the others), it's hard to believe that the vowel and accent marks were originally inspired by God.<sup>50</sup> We know it's quite possible the Jews made

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<sup>48</sup>Linguistic Key to the New Testament, p. 217; as quoted by Morey, The Trinity, p. 314.

<sup>49</sup>Anthony Buzzard and Charles Hunting, "The One God of Israel and Deut. 6:4 is the God of the Bible," The Journal, July 31, 1998, p. 14.

<sup>50</sup>S.K. Soderlund, "Text and MSS of the NT," in G.W. Bromiley, gen. ed., International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, vol. 4, p. 807. John Wheeler, in a personal communication to me (Dec. 1998), maintains that some Dead Sea Scroll fragments have vowel points and that Clement of Alexandria (who died c. 213 A.D.) mentioned the existence of the accents and vowel points. He believes what became the Tiberian system was rediscovered after the translation of the Vulgate and the writing of the Talmud by a cache of manuscripts found near

mistakes when putting in the vowel points. For example, some say Gen. 47:31 contradicts Hebrews 11:21, since the first text has Jacob worshipping at the head of his bed, but the second while he leaned on his staff. The Hebrew words for "bed" and "staff" have the same consonants, but different vowel points: "mittah" vs. "mattah." When the vowel points got added, the Jewish scribes had to determine the reading of MTTH here. They chose the vowels that made this word "bed." But since the New Testament, the Greek Septuagint, and the Aramaic Peshitta read "staff," it's likely the scribe(s) choosing this reading were wrong. Consequently, this possibility must be examined: Could have the Jews deliberately inserted the vowel points for "adoni" instead of "adonai" in this key messianic text? After all, since the New Testament gives this text such prominent placement, the traditional oral reading of the Jews by the time the vowel points were created and inserted could have "softened" this text to weaken it as a "Christian prooftext." Despite the Jews' marvelous skill and meticulousness in preserving the Old Testament, there are signs they altered the reading of one or more texts to weaken Christian messianic interpretations of some texts. The most obvious case is the apparent insertion of a semi-colon in the middle of Dan. 9:25, between the 7 and 62 weeks, which pushes back the arrival of the Messiah to just 49 years after the Persian king, Artaxerxes, issued a decree to rebuild Jerusalem in 457 b.c. Thus the Seventy Weeks Prophecy, one of the best proofs that the Messiah had to arrive by the first century A.D., is conveniently disposed of. Another curious case is the closed "mem" which appears in the word translated "of the increase" in Isaiah 9:6-7. If the rules of Hebrew grammar had been followed, a closed "mem" could never appear at the beginning of a word, but only at the end. This Hebrew word, "marbeh," always has an open "mem" elsewhere in the OT, except for here. Although this difference doesn't change the word's meaning and the reasons for this deviation can be speculated upon, it's still a slightly suspicious oddity since it appears in a key messianic text.<sup>51</sup> Having extensively dealt with the biased Jewish translations of the messianic texts of the Old Testament that Darrell Conder cited against Christianity, I'm quite convinced that the bias of these Jewish translators on many Messianic texts nearly equals Jehovah's Witnesses in the New World Translation on the Deity of Christ. It's not a wise idea to base a key Christian doctrine on the vowel pointing of a single Hebrew word in the Old Testament, a set of vowel points surely determined by the traditional (anti-Christian) Jewish oral reading of this text, not by the Holy Spirit.

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Jericho which the Karaites brought to Jerusalem. However, this viewpoint goes against the present-time scholarly consensus against their antiquity, which got its start in the sixteenth century when the Jewish scholar Elias Levita challenged their antiquity. The mere fact the vowel points totally dropped out of (evidently) centuries of Hebrew manuscripts, i.e., God's holy, inspired word, indicates they weren't considered integral to the text. It's nearly as inconceivable as imagining someone printing a book written in English without any vowels!

<sup>51</sup>See William Dankenbring, "Who is the 'Angel of the Lord' and the Messiah?," Prophecy Flash, Oct.-Nov. 1998, pp. 15-17.



## DID JESUS DENY HIS DEITY?

Fakhoury cites Mark 10:17-18 as evidence that Jesus denied His own Deity. The young rich ruler asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus replied, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone." Consider carefully Jesus' opening question in His answer: Was He denying His own goodness? If Jesus wasn't good, He couldn't be God, right? Given the Arian/Unitarian understanding of these verses, Jesus denied His own goodness first in order to deny that He was God! But, of course, the New Testament is absolutely emphatic that Jesus never sinned: "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (II Cor. 5:21). Christ "committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in his mouth" (I Pet. 2:22). Jesus clearly was "good," as Hebrews 7:26 affirms: "For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens." For the Arian/Unitarian argument to work using this text, they must accept the following syllogism:

1. Only God is good.
  2. Jesus is not good.
- Therefore, Jesus is not God.

But Arians and Unitarians (at least those who aren't liberal skeptics) must reject the second premise as totally unacceptable. That leads to a more persuasive syllogism that turns this text into evidence FOR the deity of Christ:

1. Only God is good
  2. Jesus is good.
- Therefore, Jesus is God.<sup>52</sup>

Furthermore, as McDowell and Larson observe, Jesus concluded His reply to the young rich ruler by saying, "come, follow Me," not, "come, follow God."<sup>53</sup> Similar to the great "I am" statements of John's Gospel, but more obliquely here, Christ drew attention to His

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<sup>52</sup>Someone who has taken a class in formal logic might complain that these syllogisms seemingly have an invalid form, because the key joining term "God" remains the predicate in both cases, instead of being the subject once and the predicate once (i.e., in a diagonal layout). (Similarly, in algebra, if A is B, and B is C, then A must be C). However, the use of the word "only" in the first premise removes this objection, since it makes the first proposition asserting "God is good" convertible, i.e., one could write just as well, "All good beings are God." Hence, the fully logically valid syllogism is: 1. Jesus is a good being. 2. All good beings are God. Therefore, Jesus is God.

<sup>53</sup>McDowell and Larson, Jesus: A Biblical Defense of His Deity, pp. 97-98.

own Person and authority in a way no prior prophet of God had ever done. Where did Jeremiah or Moses ever say, without further explanation, "follow me"?

## JESUS WAS WORSHIPED, REVISITED

As an Arian, Fakhoury's solution to the problem of Jesus being worshiped in the New Testament is ultimately unsurprising. Since Jesus is greater than any man or angel, He can be worshipped, but He still isn't the Almighty God:

So, if Jesus were not God, why didn't He also refuse? Because the apostles and angels understood they were mere men and ministering spirits, respectively, and the New Testament teaches that Jesus is greater than all men and all angels (Hebrews 1). Jesus was greater than men and angels because he was the Son of God, and that is what made him worthy of worship. . . . Jesus was the unique Son of God. This was all the reason He needed to receive worship (see also John 9:35-38), and it is all the reason He will ever need to receive worship.

Although this would be denied, the ancient Arian proclivity to turn Jesus into a demigod once again rears its ugly head in this "solution" to the problem of Jesus being worshipped. Jehovah's Witnesses, being somewhat more consistent monotheists, strive to avoid the word "worship" concerning Jesus in the current edition of the NWT by substituting in the word "obeisance." (See Heb. 1:6; Matt. 28:9; John 9:35; Mark 5:6; Luke 24:52, NWT). Fundamentally, human beings now should only worship the uncreated Being, the Eternal. No men, no angels, and no other god is worthy of worship. Jesus dismissed Satan by saying, "Begone Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only'" (Matt. 4:10). The Greek word translated "serve," "latreuo," effectively means "worship" as well. As Thayer's explains: "univ[ersally] to serve, minister to, either gods or men, and used alike of slaves and of freemen; in the N. T. to render religious service or homage, to worship . . . in the strict sense; to perform sacred services, to offer gifts, to worship God in the observance of the rites instituted for his worship" (pp. 372-73). The Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich explains this word as meaning, "serve, in our lit[erature] only of the carrying out of relig[ious] duties, esp[ecially] of a cultic [ritualistic] nature, by human beings" (p. 467). Besides the First Commandment, Revelation 22:9 presents additional although implicit evidence that only God should be worshiped since the angel corrected John by saying, "Do not do that . . . worship God [that is, only]." Hence, if only God is to be "worshiped", and if Jesus was "worshiped" and didn't just receive mere "obeisance," such as a human king receives from a subject bowing down to him, then Jesus was God. Fakhoury ironically asserts what Jehovah's Witnesses strenuously avoid conceding, because the latter are aware of the implications of Matt. 4:10 and Luke 4:8 for the Deity of Christ.

There are other places where Jesus is worshiped, or likely was worshiped. For

example, while he was being martyred, Stephen cried out (Acts 8:59-60: "And they went on stoning Stephen as he called upon the Lord and said, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!' And falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them!'" Another, more disputable instance occurs when the apostles pray for a replacement for Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:24-25). Notice that "the Lord Jesus" of v. 21 makes it likely that the "Lord" of v. 24 is Jesus. Notice that in Ananias' vision of Jesus, during which He told Ananias to help restore Paul's sight, that the saints called upon "the Lord" (v. 14), who surely is Jesus (v. 17). Note that Paul most likely prayed to Jesus to be healed from the thorn in his side (II Cor. 12:8-10). Notice that "the Lord" said my "power is perfected in weakness." Whose power is this? If the "power of Christ" (v. 9) dwells in Paul, then Paul had prayed to Jesus. Consider that the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders in heaven fell down before "the Lamb" (Rev. 5:8), and the elders did it again shortly thereafter (Rev. 5:14). The Lamb and God receive blessings in verses 12-13 that are highly similar to those clearly given to the Father (Rev. 7:11-12). In saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever" (v. 13), the similarity to a doxology (a type of prayer) is unmistakable. Is the doxology to "the Lord" of II Tim. 4:18 to Jesus or the Father? "The Lord" in the chapter's context (vs. 1, 8, 14) certainly is identified with Jesus. In the doxology of Hebrews 13:21, the weight of grammar makes "Jesus Christ" the referent of the phrase "to whom" since it is the closest antecedent. A similar, but more disputable construction arises in I Peter 4:11. But since the Greek word "estin" appears in for the word "whom," the doxology is turned into a statement of fact, making the "o" ("to") more likely a referent to Jesus. There's no escaping the doxology that concludes II Peter 3:18 as being a reference to Christ: "but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen." In the doxology of Rev. 1:5-6, the repetition of the third person possessive ("his") and third person pronoun ("to him") surely tilts this strongly to being a doxology to Jesus. Since there are no prayers directed to the apostles, prophets, patriarchs, or the Virgin Mary in Scripture, but prayers are so directed to Jesus just as they are to the Father, it's hard to escape the conclusion that these prove Jesus is God.<sup>54</sup> Clearly, if an Arian or Unitarian wrote scripture, these only slightly or moderately ambiguous cases of prayers to Jesus wouldn't have been allowed to exist, since grammar and context point to Jesus being the object of human or angelic adoration in them.

## CAN EVERYONE FORGIVE SINS?

Fakhoury replies against the argument that Jesus' ability to forgive sins shows He is God (Mark 2:7-11) by citing John 20:23 as proof this power was later given to other men who clearly weren't God. In this text, Jesus told the apostles: "If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they

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<sup>54</sup>For this general line of evidence of prayers to Jesus, see Morey, The Trinity, pp. 376-89.

have been retained." Hence, if anyone can forgive anyone else for his or her sins, and assuming this wasn't a specific power given to the ministry about their authority to disfellowship (I Cor. 5:3-5, 11-13), then Jesus' power to forgive sins is no proof of His divinity. So then, is there a difference between forgiving the sins of someone who did something against you personally, and generically forgiving the sins of someone who sinned against God or someone else? For example, it makes sense I can forgive a friend in the church for offending me, but could I forgive (say) the sin of idolatry that a now repentant ex-Hindu committed by worshiping an idol in a temple in Calcutta last week? It seems that this basic distinction between what sins that a man can forgive another man for is not some creation of traditional Protestantism attacking the power of Catholic priests to pronounce absolution upon a parishioner who confessed his sins, but reaches much further back. Notice that Peter, long before the crucifixion, asked Jesus, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" (Matt. 18:21). I've heard it said that Peter's question was partially a response to a Jewish teaching that you had to forgive someone only three times for his or her sins against you. Peter's question doesn't seem to reflect anything particularly innovative or "controversial," as if he were asking for a prerogative that only God had had, but he was asking for additional light on how to conduct his life properly. Given this background, John 20:23 likely concerns the forgiveness of sins committed against the apostles personally, not the generic power to give absolution to the sins of all repentant comers, similar to what Catholic priests do after confessions. There is no case in the New Testament in which an apostle forgave the sins of repentant believers that had been committed against God or against others besides himself. Hence, for the Arians and Unitarians to carry this argument against the Deity of Christ, they have to prove more from Scripture that individual believers can directly forgive any sins committed by anyone else against anyone else.

## DOES GOD HAVE TO FIT OUR DEFINITIONAL BOX?

Some of Fakhoury's seemingly best arguments come from showing Jesus the man doesn't fit our standard definitions of "God" as derived from the Bible. Hence, Jesus was tempted (Heb. 4:15) yet God can't be tempted (James 1:13). Jesus didn't know the day of his return (Matt. 24:36), yet God knows everything. Jesus died (Matt. 27:50, 58), yet God cannot die (Dan. 4:34; Isa. 57:15). Hence, Fakhoury reasons, if our definition of "God" contradicts what the Bible reveals about Jesus, then Jesus couldn't be God. The fundamental assumption here is that the definitions of "God" we humans derive from the Bible are true in all places at all times, that God Himself can't choose to limit His attributes in some manner if He doesn't wish to. In a letter to the editor of "The Journal," Eric Anderson replied to Fakhoury's arguments on this point:

He criticizes orthodox Christology for redefining the meaning of the word God to fit human limitations. It seems to me that Mr. Fakhoury has taken biblical descriptions of God in the glorified state and then turned them into

inviolable definitions of God that will help him make the case the Jesus was not God in the flesh. Mr. Fakhoury just might be confusing descriptions of God in the glorified state with definitions of God that distinguish "God" from "non-God" in all states of existence (spirit, human or any other possible state of being) at all times. I'm not convinced the leap from description to definition is always justified.<sup>55</sup>

Although Fakhoury strongly attacks it, the standard, orthodox view of Jesus, which maintains He had two natures, one human, one divine, in one Person, can still be readily defended, even if some modifications may be necessary. One solution to the puzzles Fakhoury raises is to maintain Jesus chose to limit the expression of His divine nature while in the flesh so that He wasn't literally omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, etc. The human nature of Jesus imposes limitations, by necessity, on a Being who had been an omnipresent Almighty Spirit for all eternity beforehand. Hence, by taking on a physical body, Jesus made it possible for His human side to be tempted, even as the divine side wasn't. This wouldn't give Jesus "split personalities" that didn't know what the other was doing, since one part of His one mind could be tempted while the rest wasn't, just as part of our own minds may be tempted by something while another may be simultaneously repulsed by it. (For example, consider Goya's painting of a woman trying to take the teeth of a hanging corpse to gain their supposed magical powers. While placing her hand in its mouth, she still looks away in horror and disgust, and partially covers her face with a handkerchief). By converting Himself into flesh alone, and shedding the Spirit body/extension He had always had, He made it possible for Him to die. As John Wheeler explains in his article defending the Deity of Christ: "God can die--and here is the great mystery which began this article--because God can set aside His immortality (by setting aside His glorious body) and still be God."<sup>56</sup> After all, there's always the mystery of how a (say) five-foot five-inch, 140-pound body could contain such attributes as omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, etc. However, Jesus could still be called "God" in the flesh because of His perfect character (since He wasn't born with an evil human nature)<sup>57</sup> and because His divine nature (unlike his human

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<sup>55</sup>The Journal, Sept. 28, 1998, p. 4.

<sup>56</sup>John Wheeler, "How the Bible Speaks of Jesus' and the Father's Divinity," The Journal, Aug. 31, 1998, p. 11.

<sup>57</sup>One long-time dispute among Seventh-day Adventists has been over whether Jesus' human nature was what Adam had before the Fall or after the Fall. An important issue in this debate concerns whether one accepts the doctrine of original sin, and if one does, which theological school's interpretation is correct. Calvinism and Roman Catholicism maintain that babies are born not just with an evil human nature, but are born guilty, with Adam's sin on them. Calvinism's great rival in the Protestant theological world, Arminianism, maintains babies are born with an evil human nature, but without being guilty of Adam's sin. Herbert Armstrong changed his position on this subject relatively late in life. In the reprint article, "Millions Do Not Know What Christ Really Was?," (1963), he asserted Jesus had an evil human nature, just like ours: "Christ . . . had become human, having human nature with all of

nature) was self-existent, uncreated, unmade.

## DOES THE BIBLE CONTRADICT ITSELF ABOUT JESUS' NATURE?

Although some of the standard definitional attributes traditionally asserted to define "God" wouldn't have always fit Jesus, they do fit Him other times. For example, consider the evidence for his omniscience, or knowing everything. Although Jesus didn't know the day of His return, His disciples still said of Him the night before He died (John 16:30): "Now we know that you know all things, and have no need for anyone to question you." Similarly, Fakhoury casually explains away such texts as John 1:48; 4:16-19 as proving no more than that Jesus was a prophet, but in the light of John 16:30 and His other high claims (such as John 14:6), some reconsideration is in order. Similarly, He promised to future believers that He would be omnipresent in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:20): "I, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." How could He be with us now, scattered around the earth, unless He were everywhere? He also promised: "For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst" (Matt. 18:20). Again, how could this be done, unless He was omnipresent through the Spirit? (II Cor. 3:17-18; Col. 1:27; II Cor. 13:5). Jesus learned and grew (Heb. 5:8; Luke 2:52), i.e., was changeable. Yet Jesus was also immutable (unchangeable) (Heb. 1:11-12; Heb. 13:8), just as the Eternal is (Ps. 102:26-27). Despite his death, Jesus is now "the King of kings and Lord of lords [Rev. 19:16 17:14]; who alone possesses immortality" (II Tim. 6:16-17). Of course, the Father is "the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God" (I Tim. 1:17). Just as Jesus "alone" having immortality doesn't prove the Father lacks it, neither does the Father being "the only God" prove Jesus isn't God. Scripture reveals that God is Spirit (John 4:24). Although Jesus was once in the flesh, as we are now, He is now a spirit being: "The last Adam became a life-giving spirit" (I Cor. 15:45).<sup>58</sup> Hence, even assuming the traditional

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its desires and weaknesses . . . The Satan-inspired doctrine that Jesus was not human and that He did not inherit the sinful nature of Adam . . . is the doctrine of the Anti-Christ. . . . Then there is the belief that denies the fact that Jesus inherited human nature from his mother, Mary." But in The Incredible Human Potential (1978), he denied the doctrine of original sin in both versions, writing that humans acquire an evil human nature from Satan's influence. However, he maintained, Christ was an exception: "The Ephesians (Eph. 2:1) acquired it [evil human nature] from Satan--as all humanity, except Jesus Christ." Similarly, in The Missing Dimension of Sex (1981), pp. 160-61, he wrote: "Jesus Christ obeyed God, kept God's commandments, resisted Satan, never allowed what we call 'human nature' to enter Him." See also The Wonderful World Tomorrow, 1982, p. 29. Hence, when HWA abandoned the doctrine of inherited evil human nature, then Jesus' human nature had to be automatically good.

<sup>58</sup>See Bowman's useful list of attributes about Jesus and God being seemingly contradictory in Why You Should Believe in the Trinity, p. 75. Despite quoting from this page of this book, Fakhoury makes no attempt to solve the counter-puzzles Bowman poses: Jesus has seemingly contradictory

definitions are universally applicable, if Jesus is now omniscient, omnipresent, immortal, immutable, and spirit, isn't it logical to deduce He is God? Furthermore, since Jesus has seemingly mutually-exclusive attributes asserted of Him at different times, the Arian/Unitarian solution of denying Jesus is God doesn't really solve the problems involved. Instead, it heightens them, because although their teaching adequately explains the attributes congruent with His humanity, those which fit Deity sometimes aren't. Traditional orthodoxy's solution of asserting Jesus had two natures, one human, one divine, one limited, one unlimited, is more compatible with Scriptural evidence than Unitarianism's theory, even as it fundamentally ignores the necessary limits the flesh placed on His divine nature.

## ARE MEN AND WOMEN MEMBERS OF THE SAME SPECIES?

Based on I Cor. 11:3, Bowman argues that Jesus' subordination to the Father is one of only authority and supremacy and not one originating in substance and kind because it's analogous to women's subordination to men in marriage being rooted in social roles, not in men's innate superiority to women. Knowing this analysis has some force, Fakhoury outrageously replies that men and women have fundamentally different natures in order to deny the Son's intrinsic nature equals the Father's!:

The verses [following I Cor. 11:3] argue emphatically that there is absolutely a difference between men and women "in terms of nature" (and they say nothing of this being about "husbands" or "wives"). . . . Thus we must conclude that God's headship over Christ is not merely heavenly stagecraft but a real reflection of their respective natures, just as it is between men and women.

By this reasoning, since the Father is God and Jesus isn't, which puts them in totally different categories of being, men and women are effectively made into different species! At this point, it's worth reminding ourselves that although God has given married men authority over their own wives (I Pet. 3:1-6), this doesn't mean men and women are so totally different by essence that they aren't in the same class or group. Paul wrote that, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). If the fundamental differences between men and women were equal to those between the uncreated Almighty God the Father and the (supposedly) created limited Jesus Christ, Paul could not have said men and women have an equal status before God as Christians in spiritual potential. Although God made the man before he made the woman, He made the woman from the rib of the man, i.e., of the same flesh, with nearly

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attributes asserted of Him, independent of whether they are necessarily the attributes of God. Hick's "solution" of denying Jesus is God doesn't really solve the problems involved, such as the seeming conflict between Hebrews 13:8 and Luke 2:52.

identical DNA. The difference between men and women that causes "nature itself" to teach that a man's long hair is shameful but a woman's is glorious (I Cor. 11:14) can't be said to put men in a totally different species or class from women. There's indeed an innate difference between men and women, one which most contemporary feminists are determined to ignore (except when it's to their advantage, such as in the claim, "If women ruled the world, there would be no war"), but it is completely trivial compared to the differences that loom between what is God and what isn't God, which distinguish the Father from Jesus according to Arianism. The differences involved in the social custom of covering or uncovering an unshaven woman's head when praying in public, which Paul discusses in this context, simply can't even begin to approach the fundamental ontological or intrinsic differences between Deity and humanity. If Arianism has to put men and women in different categories of being to preserve its teaching based on I Cor. 11:3's analogy between men and women with God and Christ, it's time to reconsider Arianism!

## "ALL THE FULLNESS OF DEITY" REVISITED

In Colossians 2:9, Paul writes: "For in Him [Jesus] all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form." Fakhoury maintains that the term "theotes," which is translated "Deity" here in the NASB, can mean "divinity," and thus have a "weak" definition. As noted in my earlier essay on this subject, the Unitarian scholar Joseph Thayer ironically denied that "theotes" can have a "weak" definition. The mere fact the Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich Greek-English Lexicon says that "theotes" is an "abstract noun for [theos]" does not weaken its meaning, since the word "theos," "God," is a noun itself. Today, in modern English, the term "divinity" has both a "weak" and "strong" definition. If someone said in slang, "For her performance, that actress was divine," he used its "weak" definition, since no one hearing such a statement would mistake her for being Almighty God. But, as I have used the terms "divinity" and "divine" above when referring to Christ, they have the "strong" definition, i.e. are synonyms for "Deity." Hence, objecting that "divinity" is a "quality" is irrelevant when the "strong" definition is meant: Someone who has the quality of "deity" is God, just as if I have the quality of "humanness" I am human. When the B-A-G says (p. 358) that "theotes" can be translated both "deity" and "divinity," I suspect only the "strong" definition of "divinity" was meant by its authors, in light of Thayer's emphatic differentiation between the two words. Morey claims that "All the lexicons, grammars, and commentaries define [theotes] as 'absolute Deity.'" As Kenneth S. Wuest maintains: "It is not merely divine attributes that are in mind now [in Col. 2:9's use of 'theotes'], but the possession of the essence of deity in an absolute sense."<sup>59</sup> Had Paul written such a term as "theios," it could easily (although not necessarily) have meant the "weak" definition, as the B-A-G's definitions for it show (pp. 353-54). When discussing why John may have avoided using "theios" in the third clause of John 1:1, Harris comments: "The use of [theios] would have left the statement open to what from John's point of view was a grave misinterpretation, viz. . . . that the

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<sup>59</sup>As cited in Morey, The Trinity, p. 361.



Son was essentially inferior to the Father."<sup>60</sup> Since "theotes" has no "i" in it, it's simply not persuasive to say it can have the "weak" definition of "divinity" without (say) corroboration from ancient non-Biblical Greek documents.

## THE ERROR OF THE ETERNAL GENERATION OF THE SON

One pervasive error of standard Trinitarian thinking is the concept that the Father eternally generates the Son, which Fakhoury justly labels "self-contradictory." Herbert Armstrong avoided this trap by stating that Jesus did not become "the Son of God," that is, have that title, until the incarnation occurred:

The Word [of John 1], then, is a Personage who was made flesh--begotten by God, who through this later begetting became his Father. Yet at that prehistoric time of the first verse of John 1, the Word was not (yet) the Son of God. . . . He was made God's Son, through being begotten or sired by God and born of the virgin Mary.<sup>61</sup>

The clearest verse favoring this doctrine is Hebrews 1:5, which cites Ps. 2:7 and II Sam 7:14: "For to which of the angels did He ever say, 'Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee'? And again, 'I will be a Father to Him, and He shall be a Son to Me.'"<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>Harris, *Jesus as God*, p. 66.

<sup>61</sup>Herbert W. Armstrong, *Mystery of the Ages* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1985), p. 41.

<sup>62</sup>It has been argued, based upon Acts 13:33's citation of Ps. 2:7, that this text only refers to Jesus' resurrection (cf. Rom. 1:4). It may merely refer to the completion of the process of Jesus being "born again," i.e., made into a spirit Being, since Jesus was "the first-born from the dead" (Col. 1:18). Therefore, since Jesus was the Son of God in the flesh before being crucified, buried, and resurrected, Ps. 2:7 proves nothing against eternal sonship. But this counter-argument has a major flaw, since II Sam. 7:14 is cited also as a prophecy about the future Messiah to come. Granted a standard definition of terms, since it says "I will be a Father to Him, and He shall be a Son to Me," the future tense shows Jesus wasn't the "Son of God" at the moment this text was written in the Old Testament. It's hazardous to take Acts 13:33's narrow use of Ps. 2:7 to make it refer to the resurrection only, and then apply this to II Sam. 7:14 also merely because Hebrews 1:5 cites together both Ps. 2:7 and II Sam. 7:14. Furthermore, Ps. 2:7 may have more than one application or fulfillment, and not just refer to the resurrection. Note that Hebrews 5:5 also cites Ps. 2:7, but the context of verse 7 ("In the days of His flesh") seems to point to a meaning separate from the resurrection. A dual application of texts in matters of prophecy is certainly possible here, since Peter applied a text about "the last days" to Pentecost's overwhelming grant of spiritual gifts in 31 A.D. (Acts 2:15-21). As for Ps. 2:7 referring to Jesus being "born again," a problem exists with saying Jesus could have been the "Son of God" before being conceived in the Virgin Mary. Jesus, by analogy with us humans, couldn't have been begotten by God until He

An additional, but hotly disputed (see below), verse denying Jesus' eternal sonship is Hebrews 7:3, which describes Melchizedek as "without father, without mother, without genealogy." If Jesus was Melchizedek, and Melchizedek at the time of Abraham was "without father," then Jesus couldn't be a "son" if He had no father. The Old Testament Scriptures that seem to refer to Jesus as "the Son of God" or otherwise refer to His humanity then either are prophetic in nature (such as Isa. 7:14; 9:6) or they say He looked "like" a man (Dan. 7:13) without actually being one. Although Morey cites Prov. 30:4 to back the doctrine of eternal generation, this Scripture is one of a series of semi-rhetorical questions, which makes it a weak reed for this doctrine to lean upon. Notwithstanding his credentials as the past leading "cult" critic and defender of orthodoxy, Walter Martin attacked the doctrine of eternal generation:

The doctrine of "eternal generation" or the eternal Sonship of Christ, which springs from the Roman Catholic doctrine first conceived by Origen in A.D. 230, is a theory which opened the door theologically to the Arian and Sabellian heresies which today still plague the Christian Church in the realms of Christology. . . . The term "Son" itself is a functional term, as is the term "Father" and has no meaning apart from time. . . . Finally; there cannot be any such thing as eternal Sonship, for there is a logical contradiction of terminology due to the fact that the word "Son" predicates time and the involvement of creativity. Christ, the Scripture tells us, as the Logos, is timeless, ". . . the Word was in the beginning" not the Son!<sup>63</sup>

Hence, although Jesus, as the pre-incarnate Word, had always existed, He did not gain the title "the Son of God" until He was conceived in the Virgin Mary's womb, which was when He became human, not before. Jesus' human nature (which was sinless, unlike ours) was created by God through the impregnation of the Virgin Mary, but not His Divine nature. Jesus also was considered "the Son of God" because of His resurrection from the dead (Rom. 1:4): "who was declared the Son of God with power by [marg., 'as a result of,'] the resurrection from the dead, according to the spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord." Nevertheless, Jesus couldn't be a "son" until He was a human.

## WHY "MONOGENES" DOESN'T MEAN THE WORD HAD A BEGINNING

Now why does the falsehood of eternal generation/Sonship even matter?

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had the Holy Spirit, which is when we are begotten by God. Although He had the Holy Spirit from the moment of conception, unlike almost all other humans, He still was human when He was so begotten, not earlier. For Jesus' spiritual life humanly to be like ours, He couldn't have been spiritually begotten before He was human.

<sup>63</sup>Walter Martin, The Kingdom of the Cults (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1985), p. 117. Perhaps nothing is more ironic than to see Herbert Armstrong and Walter Martin agreeing on a point of Christian doctrine! For Morey's interpretation of Prov. 30:4, see The Trinity, pp. 174-76.

Fakhoury argues that "monogenes," translated "only begotten" in John 3:16 and elsewhere, "always involves the actual and literal procreation of offspring." But if Jesus became "the only begotten Son" only at the incarnation, then this argument is easily dismissed. Because Christ had a dual nature, His taking on a human nature to add to his divine nature does not mean He had no existence before the Virgin Mary first became pregnant. The Father only begot the human nature of Jesus, not His divine nature, which had eternally existed. Since Jesus' humanity had a beginning in time, but not His divinity, the Council of Nicea could say Jesus was "begotten, not made" without committing a contradiction. Historically, "monogenes" couldn't have had a strongly pro-Arian meaning because Arius himself, in a private creed written A.D. 328, used the term "gegennehmenon" to refer to Christ, not "monogenes" or "ginomai." Similarly, Eusebius, who was a follower of Arius around A.D. 325, used the term "gegennehmenon," not "monogenes." When the use of the word "monogenes" is studied in both classical and "Koine" Greek (the latter being what the New Testament used), a dominant meaning it has is "only" or "unique."<sup>64</sup> The Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich Greek-English Lexicon (p. 527) states that monogenes means "only . . . of children . . . Of an only son . . . Also unique (in kind) of someth. that is the only example of its category. . . . In the Johannine lit. [monogenes] is used only of Jesus. The [meanings] only, unique may be quite adequate for all its occurrences here." Hence, as applied to Jesus, monogenes means merely He was the unique Son of God, "the only example of [His] category." So this word doesn't mean He began in time like any other human in His mother's womb. The special meaning in ancient Greek that monogenes had undermines Fakhoury's argument that interprets this word by saying "beget" means to procreate, and "generate" to create, neither of which has the same meaning as monogenes.

## A SON HAS THE SAME NATURE AS HIS FATHER

Following Nicea (A.D. 325), the battleground terminology between the Arians and Trinitarians concerned whether Jesus was of the same substance, similar substance, or even unlike substance. It's important to realize that the term "son," in the Semitic cultural context in which the Bible was written, didn't mean merely subordination and dependence to a father who was superior and the source of his being, as it does to us Westerners today. As Loraine Boettner observes, it involved "rather the Semitic and oriental ideas of likeness or sameness of nature and equality of being. . . . As any merely human son is like his father in his essential nature, that is, possessed of humanity, so Christ, the Son of God, was like His Father in His essential nature, that is, possessed of Deity."<sup>65</sup> Hence, if you have children, they are just as human as you are: They possess the same essence and substance that you have. Correspondingly, since

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<sup>64</sup>Martin, Kingdom of the Cults, p. 116.

<sup>65</sup>Emphasis in text, Loraine Boettner, Studies in Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: William V. Eerdmans, 1947), from pp. 152-53; as quoted in Josh McDowell and Bart Larson, Jesus: A Biblical Defense of His Deity (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1983), pp. 75-76.

Jesus was the special, unique "Son of God," He was just as much God as His Father was by origin.

## DO NEW TESTAMENT AUTHORS IDENTIFY JESUS AS JEHOVAH?

In order to get around texts in which Jesus or others apply Old Testament texts about Yahweh to Jesus, Fakhoury reasons that "in Jesus, God was represented and expressed to such a degree that when God does or say something Jesus may as well be doing or saying it; and when Jesus is doing or saying something, God may as well be doing or saying it." He then explains, in a convention still used in modern English, that when someone does something for an authority figure it's considered as if that authority figure did it himself. For example, if someone said, "Theodore Roosevelt built the Panama Canal," this doesn't mean he dug it out entirely with his own hands, but he led to its building by his instigating a revolt in Panama against Columbia and indirectly but ultimately supervising the efforts of hundreds of workers hired to construct it in Panama. Consider the basic flaw in Fakhoury's reasoning: If it's true that the New Testament's authors could have willy-nilly applied Old Testament texts about God to Jesus effectively out of context, why isn't this done for other humans? Why aren't texts about Yahweh or Elohim applied to Paul, Peter, Matthew, or John? Morey observes that various Old Testament texts about God are applied to the Father by New Testament writers. If these texts prove the Father is God, they equally must prove Jesus is God: "Any attempt to deny this method will overturn the deity of the Father as well as the Son." Again, using his method of deductive theology, Morey observes that "if the authors of the New Testament were Arians, they would never dream of doing this [applying OT texts about God to Jesus]. It would be blasphemous for them to take a passage referring to Yahweh and attribute it to Jesus [i.e., a mere man]." For example, Jesus allowed "Hosanna," an Aramaic word that had become a Jewish liturgical term that was used in worship, to be applied to Him during his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. When the chief priests and scribes objected, Jesus cited Ps. 8:1-2 in response. (See Matt. 21:15-16). Since the children were crying, "Hosanna to the Son of David," i.e., Jesus, and Jesus applied Ps. 8:2 to their praises of Him, "Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babes Thou hast prepared praise for Thyself," He was indirectly asserting that He was Yahweh, as Ps. 8:1 shows. Yahweh says when He wages war against those coming against Jerusalem that "they will look on Me whom they have pierced" (Zech. 12:10), which John alludes to and applies to Jesus in Rev. 1:7. When Paul quotes Joel 2:32 in Romans 10:16, the context (especially v. 9) indicates Jesus is the "Lord" in question: "Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord [Jehovah] will be saved." Now, if this text, which is about an act of prayer and worship towards Yahweh, had been applied to any mere human, it plainly would be blasphemous. Since it is so casually yet directly applied to Jesus by Paul, it means Jesus must also be God, not just man. In Hebrews 1:10, a text about Yahweh (Ps. 102:25; cf. v. 22) created the earth is applied to Jesus: "Thou, Lord, in the beginning didst lay the foundation of the earth." Now who did this? Yahweh did it, yet the author of Hebrews said the Son did it. So if

Jesus did it, Jesus is Yahweh. Could anyone imagine applying this text to ANY mere human, such as (say) John the Baptist, Peter, or Isaiah, and calling him thus the Creator? If Jesus is going to return, how could it be that God the Father will stand on the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:3-4)? How could Jesus indirectly stand for the Father when He stands on the Mount of Olives?<sup>66</sup> The theory of agency, as illustrated by the Theodore Roosevelt/Panama Canal analogy, simply does not fit such passages since Jesus is said to fulfill literally the texts in question, not just through the works of another person, just as Yahweh will or did.<sup>67</sup>

## ORIGEN STRIKES AGAIN!

Is John 1:1-18 an allegory or personification? Drawing upon various parallels between the word "word" in Jewish literature and the life of Jesus, Fakhoury argues that the opening verses of John shouldn't be taken at all literally. Here is another dubious offspring of Origen's thought, the allegorical school of exegesis (interpretation), just as his concept of eternal generation helped spawn the Arian heresy. Christians can always pick up the Bible, and deny a standard, literal interpretation of its content in favor of something fanciful. For example, Roman Catholicism promotes a non-literal interpretation of the Book of Revelation--amillennialism--which by this standard becomes "obviously" more sensible than premillennialism, which takes a "crudely literal" interpretation of Revelation (and Matthew 24). The references to ancient Jewish literature making personifications of the word "word" shouldn't be allowed to obscure the reality that Unitarians suddenly unveil a conveniently allegorical interpretation of John 1 in order to explain away the most problematic passage in Scripture for their viewpoint.<sup>68</sup>

Similarly, they try to escape statements that imply Christ's pre-existence, such as John 6:50-52, 58, by resorting to a non-literal interpretation of them. If true, the biggest mystery becomes how, if "the Word was God," a thought in God the Father's consciousness is actually God as well, indeed just as much God as He is. Furthermore, how this "thought" was able to create the universe by itself--for it's not stated here that the Father did it at all--remains equally an enigma: "All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being . . . the world was made through Him" (vs. 3, 10). Furthermore, unlike an idea (or plan of action) in somebody's mind, "In Him was life." Can an idea be said to be "alive," i.e., have a self-acting self-existence independent from the consciousness thinking it? Furthermore, notice that the middle verses of the passage literally refer to John the Baptist: "There came a man, sent from God, whose name was John. He came for a witness, that he

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<sup>66</sup>For the point about Jesus and Zech. 14, I'm indebted to an observation of John Wheeler's. Personal communication, December 1998.

<sup>67</sup>See the valuable discussion in Morey, *The Trinity*, pp. 370-73.

<sup>68</sup>Naturally, in a "wisdom book" such as Proverbs, Wisdom unsurprisingly is personified (re: Prov. 8). But it's a dubious claim to read an extended allegory about wisdom into a Gospel, a primarily historical book, especially when there's no discourse about the value of wisdom, etc. in the general context of the book. This is a literary category mistake.

might bear witness of the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came that he might bear witness of the light" (vs. 6-8). John is returned to in v. 15 again. Why is the reference to John literal, but not that to Jesus? It's a mighty peculiar "personification" or "allegory" that suddenly steps in and out of the historical time-space continuum.

Can a parallel case be found in all of Scripture, of a mixture of history and allegory/parable in a single passage, instead of figures or entities systematically standing for something else? Furthermore, non-literal, symbolic modes of writing in Scripture often have attention drawn to this very fact. In Gal. 4:21-31, Paul says he is "allegorically speaking" (v. 24) while making the comparison between Hagar's offspring being Jews who still practicing Judaism, and Sarah's offspring being Christians who accepted Jesus. Similarly, Christ's parables were at times followed by an immediate interpretation explaining the symbols involved, such as the parable of the sower (Mark 4:2-20). In prophecy, it's self-evident that the Beasts of Daniel and Revelation aren't intended to be taken literally, but (as is clearly explained) they stand for nations or governments. The process of spiritual conversion mentioned in vs. 12-13 concerns something literally true: "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Furthermore, in v. 10, 11, Jesus's actual earthly doings are referred to: "He was in the world . . . the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him [Luke 4:24-30]." The impersonal term "this one" used of the Word in v. 3 doesn't show that the Word has no independent consciousness, because this term is used of John the Baptist as well (vs. 7, 8). The reason why the masculine pronouns referring to the Word's personality shouldn't be seen merely as grammatical artifices is because, unlike the Holy Spirit, Christ walked the earth as a conscious human being (John 1:14). The personality of the Son is never in doubt in Scripture, while that of the Holy Spirit most certainly is.

## WAS JESUS' PRE-EXISTENCE LITERAL?

Similar to Fakhoury's argument about John 1, Anthony Buzzard claims that Jesus' pre-existence wasn't literal because Hebrew thought would mention spiritual things as if they existed in the past even when they literally didn't. Instead, it's Greek, pagan thinking to believe anyone had a literal preexistence before he or she was born.<sup>69</sup> Throughout this article, it's conspicuous that most of the texts favoring Jesus' preexistence are never actually quoted. Buzzard's reasoning is fundamentally flawed because it makes a literary category mistake: What may make some sense when applied to prophecy is wildly out of place in dialogues, monologues, or historical narratives. Furthermore, his reasoning seems to be based on extra-Biblical Rabbinical or inter-

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<sup>69</sup>Anthony Buzzard, "What is the Nature of Preexistence in the New Testament?," The Journal, Sept. 28, 1998, pp. 9-11.

Testamental sources, not Scripture. For example, it seems Buzzard cites no good OT example of this kind of reasoning. In the case of Jeremiah being known by God before his conception (Jer. 1:5), it's clearly a revelation of God's foreknowledge about what would exist in the future. It's not a case of someone later on artificially reading back into the past something which did not exist at that time. In the case of Micah 5:2, which contradicts his claims Judaism knew nothing about the Messiah literally preexisting, there's nothing about God knowing the Messiah in His mind, but it merely states, "His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity." Note John 6, where Jesus states He is the bread of life that came from heaven:

For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world. . . . I am the bread of life. . . . For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. . . . The Jews therefore were grumbling about Him, because He said, 'I am the bread that came down out of heaven.' And they were saying, 'Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, "I have come down out of heaven"?' . . . This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down out of heaven. . . What then if you should behold the Son of Man ascending where He was before? (vs. 33, 35, 38, 41-42, 50-51, 62).

Can one honestly look at Jesus' dialog with the Jews here, but still think He wasn't saying He literally came from heaven? How can one say He didn't mean He had a personal preexistence here, but He meant He was merely a thought in God's mind about His future will or plan? Notice Jesus didn't correct the misimpression of the Jews, who took His words literally. The mere fact the crowd took Jesus literally undermines Buzzard's claim that the popular Jewish mind accepted these philosophical abstractions about a non-literal preexistence. Similarly, Jesus declared He saw that something someone who literally didn't preexist before his human lifetime could not have seen (Luke 10:18): "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning." We know the fall of Satan occurred many centuries or millennia earlier from Isa. 14:12-14; Eze. 28:12-17. Although this event will occur again, as Rev. 12:9 indicates, only a Unitarian determined to impute an unlikely timing of events into Scripture would insist it occurred during Christ's human lifetime on earth. John the Baptist asserted that Jesus "existed before me" (John 1:30) despite he was born before Him. If Christ literally ascended to heaven, wouldn't His descent from heaven be equally literal when mentioned in the same sentence (Eph. 4:10; John 3:13)? Jesus denied He was from the earth like other men: "You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world" (John 8:23). Then there are the texts which assert Jesus was the Creator (Eph. 3:9 (NKJV); John 1:3, 10; Heb. 1:2; I Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16-17). It's intrinsically absurd to call a thought or plan in the mind of God the Father the Creator. If Jesus was the Creator of the universe, He obviously had to exist before it did! When Jesus prayed to

the Father, "glorify Thou Me together with Thyself, Father, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was," this can't be some abstract thought of Christ's future glory in the Father's mind. Why? Because if this glory wasn't actual, then what glory He was praying for wouldn't have been actual either! In Gethsemane (John 17:24), He also reminded the Father that "Thou didst love Me before the foundation of the world." In such a personal prayer, it seems exceedingly unlikely this was a reference to the Father loving a certain thought in His mind, as opposed to real love being manifested to another Person in a relationship between mutually conscious Beings. By making all these references to Jesus' previous life non-literal based upon (supposedly) standard Jewish thought patterns, Unitarianism not only stretches the boundaries of credulity, but ruptures them.

## THE THEORY OF ATONEMENT AND THE CHEAPENING OF CHRIST'S SACRIFICE

### MUST JESUS BE GOD TO SAVE US?

To argue that Jesus only had to be human to save us, Fakhoury cites texts that emphasize Jesus' humanity in the process of redemption. The ultimate problem with the Unitarian and Arian theories of redemption is that they make it ultimately utterly arbitrary. One of the fundamental mysteries of God's plan of redemption is why did Jesus have to die? Why couldn't God the Father in heaven just look down and say, "You're all forgiven if you repent"? Why couldn't some other human serve in place of Jesus as the source of redemption? Someone may reply, "Because only Jesus lived a sinless life, only He could be the source of redemption." But how do we know that, except by indirect theological argumentation? Scripture clearly teaches Jesus was sinless, but how is that fact connected with the atonement's requirements for its existence? Could some other righteous God-fearing human serve as the redeemer, such as Elisha or John the Baptist? If the atonement has no ontological basis, but was a mere arbitrary cancellation of the penalty of God's law for sin, how do we know that God is just in His actions? How do we know He will punish sins when they should be punished? Ultimately, the source of redemption has to be the Lawgiver Himself, since God's moral laws are intrinsic to His eternal character and nature. Having been the Lawgiver to Israel through Moses, Jesus was the originator of the Law for humanity. Having been the reason for its existence, he also could take in His own Person the penalty resulting from that law, and stand in our place for it. The one who put the moral law in motion has to be the Creator, and thus be God. The violation of the moral law demanded human death as the penalty for its violation. Consequently, Jesus had to become human (which Fakhoury stresses) to save us by becoming just like us. He also had to become human in order to die, and to give up His life temporarily so we may live eternally ourselves. Although Jesus was our Creator physically, and thus His life was worth more than all of humanity's combined, He also had to be the Lawgiver in order to be able to receive the penalty of sin in His own Person in our place. If someone believes Jesus was merely a man like any other, and not divine, the atonement has no



ontological/metaphysical basis, Jesus appears to be capriciously chosen to be our Savior, and the working out of the plan of redemption must be the mere unfolding of an arbitrary whim.

## THE GOVERNMENTAL THEORY OF ATONEMENT

The reason why an atonement was necessary to begin with was that God's government over all the universe has a law ordained by Him. This law is for the good of all. But since humans have an evil nature, they naturally wish to sin, and violate the laws of God's government, God's kingdom. There are two reasons for God having to punish sin, and not just arbitrarily let us off. First, to deter the future violations of God's own law for later acts of sin, God's government has to inflict a formal penalty upon all who violate His law. By punishing sin, it encourages others in the future not to sin. Second, it also has to inflict a penalty to uphold justice. By this second point of reasoning, punishing a murderer through the death penalty is perfectly just, even if it doesn't deter a single future murder or criminal act. However, importantly, this doesn't mean God's sense of justice requires the inflicting of an exact punishment for each act of sin by all humans. Otherwise, as Calvinism has proclaimed (to various degrees), as our sins must be transferred onto Jesus for us to be forgiven, Jesus became a sinner vicariously. Instead, what's required is a sufficiently great, perfect, and high sacrifice that shows that God's law (which is an expression of His moral character and nature) is so important to Him that it can't be casually ignored. A penalty for its violation must be inflicted. By having the Creator and the Lawgiver die for us, this bears witness to all the intelligences in the universe (human and angelic) that God's moral government over all the universe isn't a mere paper tiger, but has full substance behind it. As theologian John Miley commented, while defending the Arminian governmental theory of the atonement against the Calvinistic theory of satisfaction:

Nothing could be more fallacious than the objection that the governmental theory is in any sense acceptilational, or implicitly indifferent to the character of the substitute in atonement. In the inevitable logic of its deepest and most determining principles it excludes all inferior substitution and requires a divine sacrifice as the only sufficient atonement. Only such a substitution can give adequate expression to the great truths which may fulfill the rectoral office of penalty.<sup>70</sup>

## THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ATONEMENT IN THE STORY OF ZALEUCUS

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<sup>70</sup>Miley extensively discusses various theories of atonement, including the Socinian (Unitarian) moral-influence theory, in the following work: Systematic Theology (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers), vol. 2, pp. 65-240. The specific quote is found on p. 183.

The story of Zaleucus, a lawgiver and ruler over a colony of Greeks in southern Italy, helps to illustrate how God's law requires a high but not necessarily fully exact penalty for its violation. Zaleucus's own son violated the law, which required as a penalty the son being made blind. This case came before Zaleucus himself, causing him inner torment as his two roles as father and lawgiver conflicted. Although the citizens of the colony even were willing to ask for his son to be pardoned, he knew as a statesman that eventually the reaction against letting his son arbitrarily off would be to accuse him of partiality and injustice; consequently, in the future his laws would be broken more. Yet, as a father, he yearned to lessen or eliminate the punishment for his son. His solution? He gave up one of his own eyes so that his son would only lose one of his own!<sup>71</sup> Notice that had he paid a sum of money, or had found someone else to take the penalty for this punishment, his authority as a statesman and lawgiver would have still been subverted, since the law and the penalties for its violation weren't being taken seriously then. By giving up one of his own eyes, Zaleucus showed his own high regard for the law and the moral sense standing behind it. Likewise, the fundamental problem with the theories of atonement put forth by those denying the Deity of Christ is that they undermine the moral justice of God's government by making the sacrifice of Christ a much smaller, weaker vicarious penalty for the sins of humanity. It's well on the road to making God's forgiveness of sins arbitrary, and making the penalty for violating His law trivial. After all, if God could forgive sins for all humanity through a mere man who was sinless and virgin-born, why couldn't He use a righteous man who sinned some as the ground for atonement, such as Elijah or John the Baptist? And if the latter could be true, why not dispense altogether with someone dying for humanity's sins? Only by making a great sacrifice, such as Zaleucus did for his son, would God make it clear to all the universe's intelligences that the violation of his moral government's law, which expresses His intrinsic moral character, is not to be taken lightly, or arbitrarily ignored as He expresses His great love for humanity.

## DOCTRINES HAVE TO BE LOGICALLY CONSISTENT WITH EACH OTHER

Now someone might reply to the above reasoning, "That sounds nice, Mr. Snow, but since you don't cite any specific texts, how do we know it's anything more than theological speculation?" Here we face the reality that if we Christians are to be systematic in our theology, we can't uphold one doctrine that logically clashes with another. One or the other (or both) can't be correct then, showing somewhere we have misinterpreted the Bible. Miley uses the examples of three theological systems found within Protestantism to one degree or another, the Socinian (Unitarian), the Calvinist, and the Arminian. The doctrines of each logically interrelate to others upheld by it, and if one key doctrine or another is changed, then others must be changed for them still to cohere logically together. For example, suppose a classic Calvinist changed his mind,

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<sup>71</sup>For the story of Zaleucus and an application of it to the theory of atonement, see *Ibid.*, pp. 182-83.

and denied that the atonement was limited to the elect (the saved), but was for all humanity. Obviously, such texts as John 3:16-17; 6:51 certainly indicate the sacrifice of Christ was for all men and women, not just those who actually accept Him as Savior. But then, logically, he would have to discard his belief in predestination, in which some are destined from birth to be saved, and others damned, because if Christ died for the whole world, and those whom He atones for must be saved, then all would be saved. But clearly since not all will be saved, their individual free wills must be what determines who is saved and who isn't. So then, the teaching of "once saved, always saved" must be eliminated, because if God grants us free will to accept salvation, it must be He will let us cancel our salvation any time we wish. Consequently, a major problem with Unitarianism and Arianism is that their advocates (if logically consistent) inevitably cheapen the costs of Christ's sacrifice. The (liberal Unitarian) Socinian system, for example, doesn't really believe in the atonement having any objective, ontological ground, since Christ's life and death is seen as only having a moral influence on others to live more righteous lives. As Miley notes:

With Socinus [1539-1604] the moral theory sprung naturally from his system of theology, especially from his Christology. In the assertion of Christ's simple humanity, doctrinal consistency required him to reject all schemes of a real objective atonement, and to interpret the mediation of Christ in accord with his own Christology. The moral theory is the proper result. It is the scheme which his system of theology required, and the only one which it will consistently admit.<sup>72</sup>

Although Fakhoury, Buzzard, Hunting, etc. presumably reject Socinus' theory of the atonement, it becomes an uphill struggle to avoid the implications of their own Christology that favors an arbitrary, capricious treatment of God's law and government, which necessarily causes questions about His moral character. If God can forgive any offense without a penalty being inflicted, or without it being inflicted on someone of substance to the Lawgiver, how do we know He will uphold justice in the world to come? Only through the sacrifice of a God being, indeed, the Lawgiver Himself, does it become clear to all men and all angels that God will uphold His law and the necessary penalties for breaking it regardless of cost to Himself, thus ensuring His grace and mercy do not undermine His justice and equity in the eyes of His creatures.

## CONCLUSION: SHOULD WE ACCEPT THE JEWISH DOCTRINE OF GOD?

Although a book could easily be written on the evidence for the Deity of Christ, the above analysis shows the Arian/Unitarian case only has a superficial plausibility. Its fundamental error lies in accepting at face value the interpretation of the Jews of the nature of God since it effectively denies the progressive nature of God's revelation about His nature in Scripture and denies how frequently the Old Testament itself implies

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 126.

a plurality in the Godhead. The Jews' definition of "one" as "one Person" is utterly taken for granted. Having done so, it then proceeds to overturn standard grammatical usages and interpretations of words to support its teaching, or evade the meaning of texts that contradict it. In order to save itself as a theory, it has to allegorize texts, retranslate texts, and/or revise texts. By contrast, Binitarian monotheism so much more effortlessly fits the available Scriptural evidence without so many ad hoc secondary modifications to save itself from falsification. It employs effectively wields Occam's Razor, by using the simplest yet most complete explanation of all the facts of a complicated reality. It accepts the likely or most likely meaning and/or reading of many texts where Unitarianism/Arianism usually has to submit a special pleading for the rare or unusual meaning or reading of the texts in question. It makes grammar determine doctrine, not doctrine grammar. But the greatest problem Unitarianism and Arianism face is their cheapening of the sacrifice of Christ and our Savior by demoting Him from God Almighty to mere man or angel, thus making God's plan of redemption look increasingly capricious and His sense of justice more questionable. Since the God whom we worship has revealed to us that "great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16, NKJV), let us reject the Arian and Unitarian heresies against the Deity of "Our Great God and Savior" (Titus 2:13), Jesus Christ.

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